Action Stories of Every Variety

ARGOSY

ISSUED WEEKLY

NOV. 23

10¢
Canada 15¢

"Run, Dan, Run!"

Latest Crime Novel

by Fred MacIsaac

—

H. Bedford-Jones'
Romantic Novel
"Cyrano"

Newest Styles
Dignified Credit at Saving Prices

10 DAYS' FREE TRIAL

12 Months to Pay

$50.00

DT1-Newest Butterfly design, of 18K Solid White Gold engagement ring set with sparkling, genuine blue-white diamond. $4.08 a mo.

$29.50

DT28-Gorgeously hand engraved 18K Solid White Gold "Bridal Blossom" wedding ring; 5 fiery genuine blue-white diamonds. $2.37 a mo.

$42.50

DT27-The "Bridal Blossom"—Hand pierced lace design engagement ring of 18K Solid White Gold, genuine blue-white diamond of rare brilliance. $3.46 a mo.

$48.50

DT12-Dazzling cluster of 7 perfectly matched genuine blue white diamonds; hand pierced 18K Solid White Gold lady's mounting. Looks like $750 solitaire. $3.96 a mo.

$42.50

$75

DT23-Modern, square-prong, engagement ring in new "step" design 18K Solid White Gold set with specially selected dazzling, genuine blue-white diamond. $6.16 a month.

$50

DT7-New, massive, gentleman's ring of 14K Solid Green Gold and 18K Solid White Gold top; with a flashing, genuine blue-white diamond. $4.08 a month.

$29.50

DT26 - Latest style, modernistic effect 18K Solid White Gold lady's ring; fiery genuine blue-white diamond. $2.37 a month.

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No Red Tape
No Delay

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$37.50

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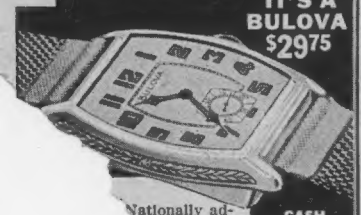
DT9-The "Princess Pat"—14K Solid White Gold engraved case, guaranteed 15-jewel movement. Engraved genuine "Wristacrat" flexible bracelet to match. $1.96 a month.

IT'S A BULOVA $29.75



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ESTABLISHED 1895

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AND BILLS KEEP PILING UP ON YOU TILL YOU CAN'T SEE HOW IN THE SAM HILL YOU'RE EVER GOING TO GET OUT OF DEBT—

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AND YOU START USING THOSE SECRETS YOURSELF AND LEARN WHAT IT IS TO REALLY MAKE BIG MONEY AS A SALESMAN —

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Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

Age.....Occupation.....

ARGOSY

ISSUED WEEKLY

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday throughout the United States and Canada

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and
LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE., 16-17 King William Street, Charing Cross, W.C.2
PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE., 111 Rue Réaumur
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President and Treasurer C. T. DIXON, Vice-President
PUBLISHED WEEKLY AND COPYRIGHT, 1929, BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY.
Single copies, 10 cents; by the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $7.00 to Canada and Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered
Entered as second-class matter November 28, 1896, at the post-office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

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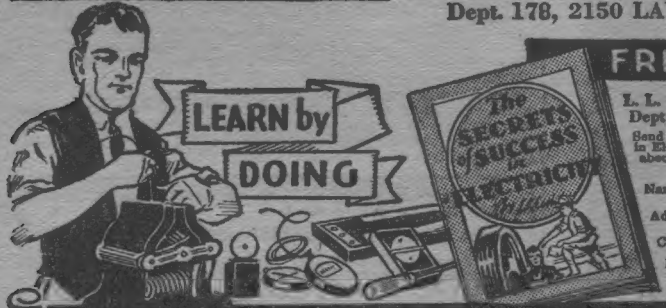

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The "Cooke" Trained Man is the "Big Pay" Man

Classified Advertising

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Classified Advertising Rate in The Munsey Combination Comprising:

All-Story (Combined with Munsey) - - - - - - - -
Argosy - - - - - - - - -
Detective Fiction Weekly -

Combination line rate **$3.00** less 2 per cent cash discount.

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NO BREAK TO HEAL

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Stop wasting your time and money on old-fashioned devices. Learn how to close the hernial opening as nature intended, so the rupture can't come down. Send no money; just mail the Free Test coupon below. For your own good—write today—tomorrow may be too late.

FREE TEST COUPON

Plapao Laboratories, Inc., 449 Stuart Bldg., St. Louis, Mo.

Send me a Free 10 day test supply of the remedial factor Plapao and 48-page illustrated book on Rupture; no charge for this now or later.

Name.....

Address.....

"How I Licked Wretched Old Age at 63"

I Quit Getting up Nights—Banished Foot and Leg Pains . . . Got Rid of Rheumatic Pains and Constipation . . . Improved Embarrassing Health Faults . . . Found Renewed Vitality.

"At 61, I thought I was through. I blamed old age, but it never occurred to me to actually fight back. I was only half-living, getting up nights . . . embarrassed in my own home . . . constipated . . . constantly tormented by aches and pains. At 62 my condition became almost intolerable. I had about given up hope when a doctor recommended your treatment. Then at 63, it seemed that I shook off 20 years almost overnight."

Forty—The Danger Age

These are the facts, just as I learned them. In 65% of all men, the vital prostate gland slows up soon after 40. No pain is experienced, but as this distressing condition continues, sciatica, backache, severe bladder weakness, constipation, etc., often develop.

PROSTATE TROUBLE

These are frequently the signs of prostate trouble. Now thousands suffer these handicaps needlessly! For a prominent American Scientist after seven years of research, discovered a new, safe way to stimulate the prostate gland to normal health and activity in many cases. This new hygiene is worthy to be called a notable achievement of the age.

A National Institution for Men Past 40

Its success has been startling, its growth rapid. This new hygiene is rapidly gaining in national prominence. The institution in Steubenville has now reached large proportions. Scores and even hundreds of letters pour in every day, and in many cases reported results have been little short of amazing. In case after case, men have reported that they have felt ten years younger in six days. Now physicians in every part of the country are using and recommending this treatment.

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THE ELECTRO THERMAL COMPANY
3023 Morris Avenue **Steubenville, Ohio**

If you live West of the Rockies, mail your inquiry to
The Electro Thermal Co.,
303 Van Nuys Building, Dept. 30-Z
LOS ANGELES, CALIF.

THE ELECTRO THERMAL CO.,
3023 Morris Ave., Steubenville, Ohio.
Name.....
Address.....
City..... State.....

$1,000 Reward!

In a dirty, forlorn shack by the river's edge they found the mutilated body of Genevieve Martin. Her pretty face was swollen and distorted. Marks on the slender throat showed that she been brutally choked to death. Who had committed this ghastly crime?

Crimes like this are being solved every day by Finger Print Experts. We read in the papers of their exploits, hear of the mysteries they solve, the rewards they win. Finger Print Experts are the heroes of the hour.

More Trained Men Needed

The demand for trained men by governments, states, cities, detective agencies, corporations, and private bureaus is becoming greater every day. Here is a real opportunity for YOU. Can you imagine a more fascinating line of work than this? Often life and death depend on finger print evidence—and big rewards go to the expert. Many experts earn regularly from $3,000 to $10,000 per year.

Learn At Home in Spare Time

Now, through this amazing new, simple course, you can learn the secrets of this science easily and quickly at home in your spare time. Any man with common school education and average ability can become a Finger Print Detective in surprisingly short time.

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"My Pay Raising-Plan" It Shows You How I Prepare You at Home For

send you these Genuine high quality, Imported Drawing Instruments, 14 Other Tools and a Drafting Table—All included in my Home Training Course.

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In *These and Other Great Industries*

Automobile—Electricity—Motor Bus—Aviation—Building Construction.

There are jobs for Draftsmen in all of these industries and in hundreds of others.

Aviation is expanding to enormous proportions.

Electricity is getting bigger every day. Motor Bus building is becoming a leading world industry.

Building of stores, homes, factories and office buildings is going on all the time. No structure can be erected without plans drawn by a draftsman. No machinery can be built without plans drawn by a draftsman.

I train you at home, in Drafting, Keep the job you have now while learning.

Earn As You Learn

I tell you how to start earning extra money a few weeks after beginning my training.

I will train you in drafting right where you are in your spare time. I have trained men who are making $3,500.00 to $9,000.00 a year. Get started now toward a better position, paying a good, straight salary, the year around. Comfortable surroundings. Inside work.

Employment Service

After training you I help you to get a job without charging you a cent for this service. Employers of Draftsmen come to me for men. Employers know they are not taking chances on men trained by me.

No Experience Necessary

You do not need to be a college man nor high school graduate to learn by this method. No previous experience necessary. I make a positive money back guarantee with you before I begin to train you.

If you are now earning less than

$70.00 a WEEK

I train you at home!

Write For My FREE "Pay-Raising Plan"

Mail this coupon at once. Get "My Pay-Raising Plan". It certainly points the way to success. You owe it to yourself to send for this book. Find out how I help you find big opportunities in practically all big industries. The book will come to you post paid and FREE. Mail the coupon for it today.

Engineer Dobe

1951 Lawrence Ave., Div. 11-48 Chicago

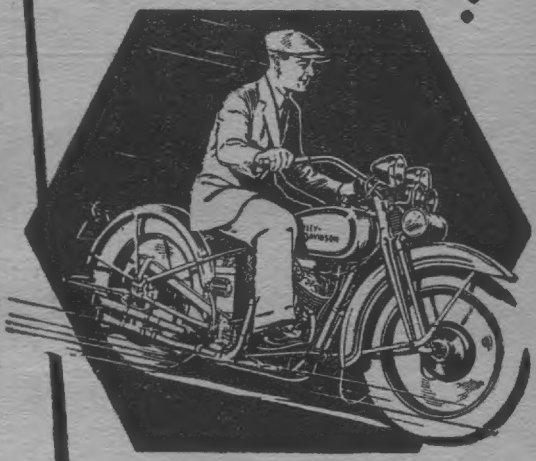
Send me Free of all cost, "My Pay-Raising Plan". Also plan to earn money while learning to be a draftsman and proof of big money paying positions in great industries.

Name..... *Age*.....

Address.....

Post Office..... *State*.....

WHOOPEE on Wheels!



WHOOPEE that's healthful — motorcycling, sport of a thousand thrills!

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Ride away on a "45" Twin, 1930 model, and revel in motorcycling at its best. On long tour or short ride, you'll enjoy every mile—and the miles will cost you almost nothing.

Your dealer wants to show you the 1930 models. See him today—ask about his Pay-As-You-Ride Plan.

Mail the Coupon for literature showing our Singles and Twins for 1930.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON *Motorcycles*

Harley-Davidson Motor Co., Dept. M. G., Milwaukee, Wis.
Interested in your motorcycles. Send literature.

Name.....

Address.....

My age is ☐ 12-15 years ☐ 16-19 years ☐ 20-30 years ☐ 31 years and up. Check your age group.

ARGOSY

ISSUED WEEKLY

VOLUME 208 SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 1929 NUMBER 2

"You know I never insulted you!" he cried. "Why did you tell him I did?"

"Run, Dan, Run!"

Dan Greer, sidetracked in a newspaper cubby-hole, finds that he can't dodge Life and the surprising hazards of New York

By ***FRED MacISAAC***

Author of "The Mental Marvel," "Paris Madness," etc.

CHAPTER I.

MODESTY CAN BE A VICE.

AMONG the Beatitudes which every child learns to recite by rote in Sunday school is a statement that the meek are blessed and shall inherit the earth. There was no question that Daniel F. Greer was meek; that was his principal trouble; and his prospects of inheriting anything were very remote. At the age of twenty-eight Dan was exchange editor of the New York *Globe*, earning forty-five dollars per week. He had no apparent chance of advancement; and it didn't bother him much because he had no ambition beyond holding his job.

The exchange editor of a newspaper is up a blind alley; the job doesn't get anywhere. A reporter may rise to become editor in chief, a solicitor may reach the post of business manager, but the exchange editor stays on the job until his eyes give out from reading badly printed newspapers.

The worst of it was that Dan liked the work Something like two hundred newspapers were delivered to his office every morning, from every nook and crevice of the continent, and from Europe came the London *Times* and *Daily Mail* and the Paris *Matin*.

It was his duty to go through these papers in search of attractive items which had escaped the wire services, clip them, write headings for them, and send them down to the composing room to be set into type and left standing on the galleys until such time as the make-up man wanted to fill a hole in the paper. That worthy never bothered to discover what an exchange story was about; he selected it for its size.

This was only part of Dan's work. He also clipped personal items from the exchanges to be filed away in the obituary envelopes of persons likely to require a biographical notice upon their death or participation in a scandal.

It would be impossible for a man to occupy this desk on a newspaper for five or six years without becoming singularly well informed. Dan Greer was a walking encyclopedia of information upon every conceivable subject; but this encyclopedia was so modestly bound that it never attracted any attention.

It might be expected that a man of his sort would be pale, thin, bespectacled, and small, but it happened that Dan was a big blond man, five feet eleven in his stockings, broad-shouldered, powerful, and not in the least ugly. He had a long narrow face, gray eyes which did not need glasses, regular features, and a personality that would have been agreeable if anybody had observed it. That he was unnoticed and unconsidered was due to a certain kink in his mind which psychologists call "an inferiority complex."

THINGS had been happening to Dan since childhood which had brought about his mental attitude. He had a mother who persisted in treating him as a baby five or six years too long. He was awkward as a child, and his excellent mind was deliberative and devoid of brilliancy, which caused a stupid school teacher to decide he was a dunce; so she exercised what she thought was a sense of humor at his expense.

Restrained by his mother from participation in boyish sports, he attempted too late to join the boys who were playing football and baseball—only to be jeered at for his ignorance of their games.

Being extremely sensitive, these trifles seemed tremendously important to him; and as he grew older and began to be aware of girls, he found himself unable to compete for their esteem with other boys. Up to the time he was nineteen years old Dan Greer had had it continually brought home to him that he was dull, clumsy, graceless, and unpopular. Why wouldn't he be meek?

He stood well in his studies in high school, and all he got for it was the reputation of a stubborn plugger. Eager to be a writer, he submitted articles to the school paper, and had them returned to him because his name was signed to them, and for no other reason. But poor Dan supposed they were worthless. The truth was that his name prevented them from being read.

There was no money to send him to college, and when he graduated from high school a friend of his widowed mother, whose husband was the city editor of the *Globe,* persuaded the editor to give him a chance as a reporter.

Dan did well enough when sent to report speeches and meetings, though his self-consciousness caused his stories to be stiff and pedantic; but his shyness made him impossible upon a news story. He could not bring himself to approach a stranger and ask questions.

His timidity was so obvious that the men in the city room made a butt of him, and his shrift would have been short had the exchange editor not applied for an assistant. There was no competition for the job, and it was awarded to Dan, who thus found his niche.

A year later the exchange editor, who was seventy-four years old and had occupied the post for forty years, gave up the ghost, and Dan slid into the position. Two years later his mother died and left him alone in the world.

He could live well enough on his salary; he was happy because he was off by himself in a cubbyhole and the staff had ceased to bother him. He hadn't had a raise for three years, and probably would never get another unless he asked for it—which meant he wouldn't ever get it.

This is rather a good deal to say about Dan Greer, who was almost as drab and uninteresting a person as it's possible to imagine. Nothing exciting had ever happened to him, and nothing ever would have happened to him, in all probability, if the *Globe* hadn't needed a motion-picture critic and employed Annabel Ferguson.

In the opinion of the *Globe* city room, Annabel Ferguson was a kind of nut; sort of pretty, but weak-minded, as was naturally the case with a motion-picture critic. She was a small girl, not plump, yet anything but angular, with a round cherubic face, large wondering brown eyes whose beauty was not subdued much by the tortoise-shell spectacles she quite unnecessarily wore. Her nose was snub and her mouth was too wide; and her mop of brown hair usually looked as though she didn't comb it often.

She affected to be careless in dress and usually wore black, and she toddled around in shoes that were down at the heel, but she wasn't exactly hard to look at. She was an intense little person, given to superlatives and what the staff called gush, but the reporters were a bit jealous of her because her excessive use of adjectives earned more for her in reviewing films than most of them were paid for being expert newsgatherers.

Although newspapers have been employing girls for a decade, newspaper men still refuse to take them seriously and continue to resent their presence in what was once as free and easy a fraternity as an East Side Tammany Club.

THE motion-picture critic frequently found it necessary to visit the office "morgue." She would require the envelope on Mary Pickford or Clara Bow or Douglas Fairbanks; and, peering through the grille which protected the shrinking exchange editor, she would fling a cheerful remark at him and vanish before he could think of a suitable reply.

About eight on one June evening, entering the cafeteria opposite the

Globe office, she spied Dan eating a solitary meal with three or four out-of-town newspapers beside his plate. Blithely she carried her tray to a seat opposite him.

"Good evening, Mr. Greer," she said brightly.

Dan looked up, colored, mumbled, and dropped his eyes to his newspaper.

"Don't be rude," she challenged. "I came over here because I hate to eat alone, and the least you can do is talk to me."

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered, and colored to the roots of his hair.

In attempting to remove the newspapers from the table he knocked over his glass of water and became frantic with embarrassment.

Dan was terribly afraid of women, being certain that he was unattractive in their eyes and completely at a loss how to talk to them. Annabel didn't terrify him as much as a really beautiful girl would have done, but she was a woman, and that was enough.

She mopped up a pool of water on the table very deftly with a napkin, called a bus boy to finish the job of restoring things, and smiled brightly at the abashed young man.

"Have you an encyclopedia in your office, Mr. Greer?" she demanded.

"Yes. Several."

"That's good. There was an announcement to-day that De Mille is going to make a film of Sumerian civilization. I must admit that I haven't the faintest idea what Sumerians were, or if they ever had a civilization. Do you suppose it's in the Britannica, or is it some imaginary race like the Atlantans?"

"The Atlantides, you mean," he replied. "On the contrary, the Sumerians were a real people. They lived in Asia Minor, and are supposed to have flourished between eight and five thousand years before Christ. They attained a considerable degree of civilization. Specimens of their writings have been found, and a number of relics."

"You don't say!" she gasped. "Eight thousand years before Christ! I guess the picture will be largely imaginary, at that."

"I don't think there is enough knowledge of them to cramp the style of the film people."

"But I didn't know anybody was alive ten thousand years ago. I thought the world was only six thousand years old."

"We have absolute evidence that the great pyramids in Egypt were built four thousand years before Christ, which means that mankind had attained a pretty high degree of civilization at that time. I believe most Bible scholars admit that the age of the world set down in Holy Writ is not to be taken literally."

Launched on a subject upon which he had read widely, Dan talked fluently and well, and the girl listened raptly. At the end of a quarter of an hour he suddenly realized that he had been gabbing his head off, and to a woman. He blushed, stammered, and broke down.

"WHAT'S the matter with you?" demanded Annabel.

"I—that is—you know I have been monopolizing the conversation."

"Say, I learned more about ancient history in the last fifteen minutes than I ever learned in school. What's a man like you doing in that rat-hole across the street?"

"Why, it's the only thing I can do," he said, surprised.

"Rot. You ought to be a college professor or a lecturer. How much do you earn a week?"

"Forty-five dollars."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself. I make seventy-five, and I'm years younger than you are."

"You're a brilliant writer, and I have no talent," he answered.

"Rubbish. I'm badly educated, and don't know what I'm talking about half the time, and you are a scholar. Why did you let them poke you into that cubby-hole?"

"It's all I'm fit for," he said bitterly. "I tried being a reporter, but I was a flop."

"Why?"

"Well, I lack the necessary qualities. I couldn't go up to people and ask them impudent questions. And I can't write."

She laughed. "Anybody can write. They teach it in the public schools. Don't you know there's no future on your job?"

"I don't care," he said sullenly.

"But you expect to marry and have a home, don't you? And you'll need a good income to take care of your family."

"I'll never marry."

"Why not? A woman-hater?"

"No-o, but I'm not attractive to women. Why should I be?"

"Really?" She opened her eyes wide. "Who told you so?"

"I've had it beaten into me," he said woodenly.

"Disappointed in love?"

"I've never been in love. I've never known any woman except my mother. I just don't appeal to them."

She appraised him. "You are not crippled or maimed. I don't see anything the matter with you. Lots uglier men than you have won the love of beautiful women. Snap out of it, young man."

He wagged his head. "I know," he declared.

"You have a very pleasant speaking voice and you express yourself beautifully. I heard in the office that you were a dumb boob, but you look to me as if you had more brains than that whole menagerie of monkeys and hyenas."

"I guess dumb boob describes me," he said bitterly. He was perfectly aware how he was considered in the city room.

"You've got a bad case of shyness and what they call an inferiority complex. Take a look at me, Mr. Greer. Not a decent feature, nothing to recommend me, not even a good writer, but I get along on my nerve. Say, if I had your equipment—"

"I have no equipment, not even a college education; and you're not homely," he replied.

"What's a college education? I bet you've learned more, reading the news of the world and all the books in the public library, than anybody ever learns in college. What you need is to have a bomb exploded under you."

"I don't get you."

"I mean you ought to be fired from that job. Then you could go out and take the world by the throat and squeeze something worth while out of it. I've got to review a picture, and I've got two tickets. Want to come?"

"I'm sorry," he said, blushing foolishly. "I—I've got an engagement."

"Like fun you have," she replied. "But don't come if you don't want to. Think over what I've been telling you."

After she had gone Dan decided

that she was a pleasant, kindly little person who meant well but didn't know what she was talking about.

Annabel appeared at the grille of the obituary cabinet several times in the next week and tried to engage him in conversation, but Dan was laconic, and she gave it up in disgust.

On Saturday the bomb went off. Dan drew out of his letter box an envelope the color of which caused his heart to sink. It was blue. His hand trembled as he tore it open.

> DEAR MR. GREER:
>
> Because of changes in the staff, your services will be no longer required after to-day. You may draw two weeks' salary by presenting this letter to the cashier.
>
> WM. AVERY,
> Managing Editor.

Dan walked slowly to his desk, his world tumbling about his ears. Such a thing as this was unheard of. Nobody ever bothered the exchange editor. His predecessor had held the job for forty years. So it had developed that he was even a worse misfit than he had supposed. A failure.

CHAPTER II.

FALSE CHARGES.

DAN GREER sat for half an hour gazing at the azure note paper, and gradually his dismay was replaced by resentment against an obvious act of injustice. His work had always been done well; on numerous occasions the managing editor had admitted it. This flimsy excuse, changes in the staff, was no excuse at all. He was entitled to know why he was discharged. By Heaven, he was going to find out!

His march to the sanctum of the managing editor was the most aggressive act of his life thus far. His choler rose with each step, and he pushed open the door without knocking. Mr. Avery looked up and stared in astonishment at the truculent person who entered. It was the first time he had ever really looked at the exchange editor.

"I have been discharged," said Dan harshly. "I am entitled to an explanation, it seems to me."

The managing editor frowned and his eyes snapped angrily.

"The charge against you seemed incredible to me at first, but your present attitude convinces me," he said sharply. "You were the last man in this office of whom I would believe such a thing."

"What thing? The charge, if you please?" demanded Dan.

"You are discharged for insulting a young lady member of the staff," he said sternly. "Women in this office will be protected as long as I am managing editor."

"It's a lie," shouted Dan. "I never insulted anybody. Who says I have insulted her?"

"I don't think Miss Ferguson is a liar," replied Mr. Avery. "She made the charge."

The incredulity in his eyes, the astonishment which caused his mouth to drop open, might have meant something to the editor if he had not swung around in his swivel chair and picked up a manuscript.

"I—I—all right," stammered Dan, and rushed out of the office.

So shocked and abased was he by the preposterous accusation that it was several minutes before he realized that he should have demanded to be confronted with Annabel Ferguson; and then he quailed at the prospect of hearing a denunciation. He would have faced a man quickly enough, and, in

his mood, would not have hesitated to fight with him—but what could he do against a woman, a crazy woman at that?

The girl must be mad to accuse him, of all people, of insulting her. Why, they had conversed very pleasantly that night in the cafeteria and exchanged friendly greetings several times since. How could she have construed anything he had said as an insult? He had considered her kindly and considerate; and she had falsely accused him behind his back. What had he said?

Ah! She had invited him to accompany her to a picture show that night, and he had pleaded an engagement. He remembered that she had laughed and insinuated that the engagement was fictitious, and they had parted pleasantly. Had this been rankling in her mind until it assumed the proportions of an affront? It didn't seem possible.

And Mr. Avery, after Dan's six or seven years of faithful service, had accepted the unsupported statement of a girl who had been on the paper only a few months; had dismissed him without giving him a chance to defend himself. He was disgraced; he could never hold his head up again. He certainly wouldn't work another minute for a newspaper which treated loyal employees in this manner.

This was the end of him. What could he do? Where could he go? Damn the girl, he had never sought her company. She had forced herself upon him that night, insisted that he talk to her, kidded him along, pretended to be impressed by his nonexistent talents, and then turned upon him like the treacherous wild cat that she was.

Dan packed his few belongings, gave a few instructions to his office boy, and, without saying good-by to anybody in the plant, walked out of the building and took a street car to his furnished room.

HE was lying supine on the bed, too crushed to think connectedly, too bewildered to be angry with the cause of his humiliating dismissal, when Mrs. Cassidy, the landlady, screamed his name shrilly from the ground floor. Dan rose and opened his door.

"Some one to see you, Mr. Greer," she squalled.

"All right," he answered numbly.

He walked to his closet and took his coat from a hanger, donned it, and went slowly downstairs. Mrs. Cassidy was strongly against visitors in the rooms of her lodgers, and permitted them to be received only in the front parlor.

Dan entered the room, and saw Annabel Ferguson standing in the middle of the floor, her eyes frightened, her hands clutched and wriggling nervously.

"Oh, Mr. Greer," she stammered, "can you ever forgive me?"

Dan gaped at her. That his traducer should have the effrontery to follow him to his home dumfounded him for a minute.

"What do you want? Why did you come here?" he ejaculated hoarsely. "Haven't you done harm enough?"

"Mr. Avery told me he had to admit to you that it was I who accused you. I had to come to explain—"

Dan stood with legs spread wide apart and his hands thrust into his trousers pockets. His eyes smoldered with indignation.

"You know I never insulted you," he declared. "I never insulted anybody. I never wanted to talk to you; you made me, and now you get me

kicked off my job and cover me with disgrace. If I didn't think you were crazy—"

She was very pale, but stood her ground against the menace in his expression.

"I am a nut, all right," she said in her explosive fashion. "I do things on impulse. I'm frightfully sorry, now, about this."

"Lot of good that does me," he growled. "What did you do it for? What did I ever say?"

"Nothing, of course. I lied about you. I did it deliberately."

Dan's gaze was baleful. "If you only were a man, I'd knock you down."

"And I wouldn't blame you," she exclaimed. "It's because you don't understand. Please sit down, Mr. Greer. I'm sure you will appreciate my motive. I can't talk with you standing there glowering like that."

Dan backed reluctantly to a chair and seated himself. Annabel sat down on the opposite side of the room.

"I earn my living by writing about motion pictures," she began, "but my hobby is psychology."

"I don't give a damn," declared Dan, "what your hobby is. I don't want to talk to you at all. I want you to go."

"You've got to listen. I've thought a lot about you, Mr. Greer."

"Lot of lies," he muttered.

"You seemed to me to be a most pathetic case. Here you were, big, strong, capable, unusually intelligent, fit to make something very much worth while out of yourself—and you were beaten and cowering in a hole because of a warped mental attitude."

"I know I'm no good, if that's what you mean. That doesn't justify you in telling lies about me."

"The end justifies the means," she asserted, talking very fast. "Your trouble was lack of incentive. Just because you earned enough to live on, you were satisfied to be a shrinking hermit. Don't you remember that I told you in the restaurant that you needed a bomb exploded under you? Well, I made up my mind to explode the bomb. That's why I got you fired."

CHAPTER III.

THE IMPULSIVE YOUNG LADY.

DAN should have been shaking with righteous indignation at this naïve confession; but, curiously, the thing began to appeal to his sense of humor. This intense, vibrant and partially demented young woman had taken a friendly interest in him, was eager for his welfare, wished him to succeed in the world—so she had gone to the managing editor and demanded his discharge for insulting her. It was dreadful, but it was funny.

"So you think I owe you a debt of gratitude for disgracing me and having me kicked off my job," he said with a grim smile. "Well, much obliged."

Annabel clapped her hands ecstatically. "I knew you would be like this. I knew you would take it in the right spirit. I came here to offer, if you had a different attitude, to go to Mr. Avery and confess that there wasn't a word of truth in what I said. Of course it would cost me my job, but I wouldn't care."

"I don't want you to lose your job," he said slowly. "I wouldn't go back to the *Globe* on any terms. They threw me out upon your unsupported statement, though they must know you are

as mad as a hatter. Does your mastery of psychology inform you what I am going to do now? I am totally unfitted by temperament and training for any work in the world except clipping newspapers."

"I'm not mad, and I know you'll make good somehow," she declared. "It's wonderful the way you take this. It demonstrates the accuracy of my analysis of you. You are a big man, Mr. Greer, capable of big things. A small man would have pleaded with me to set him right with Mr. Avery."

Dan grinned wryly. "When I have starved to death, will you come to my funeral, or will your conscience prevent you?"

"If you starve to death, I'll come; but you won't. Now, as I am responsible for your sudden dismissal, I thought—that is—I have saved quite a little money—"

Dan rose abruptly, and for the first time his eyes were smiling.

"Are you offering me a loan?"

She nodded.

"I've saved a little myself, and I inherited a thousand dollars when my mother died; but I appreciate your kind attention. Miss Ferguson, I don't exactly know what attitude to take toward you. Obviously, your intent toward me is friendly, and I am grateful for that because I have never made a friend. But, looked at from any angle, your behavior has been inexcusable. Psychology is a science which is too young to justify its students in taking direct action to vindicate their theories, and human vivisection is still a criminal offense."

"Oh, Mr. Greer—"

"You have not the justification of friendship, based upon long acquaintance, to break into my life and turn its current out of the direction I had selected for it. Nothing justifies libelous charges. It's possible that I shall be branded as a man who insults women."

"No, no. Nobody knows it except Mr. Avery and myself, and he promised not to tell any one."

"It may get out. I know as well as you do what's the matter with me. I probably have a sounder understanding of what little is known of psychology than a person of your erratic mentality could ever possess. I deliberately took the line of least resistance, and I bitterly resent being chucked into the turmoil of the battle for existence. You have usurped God's privilege, young woman, when you interfered with the direction of another person's life."

HE stopped, and looked uneasy, for Annabel was weeping. "I'm sorry if I hurt you," he said penitently.

"It isn't that," sobbed Annabel. "I'm—I'm glad, glad! Nobody who can talk so wonderfully has any business putting clippings in envelopes in a newspaper morgue."

Dan stared at her in perplexity, and for the first time he observed that she was a pretty little thing. He had studiously trained himself not to notice whether women were attractive or otherwise, because he didn't like homely ones, and the pretty ones were certain to be contemptuous of him. He was touched by her tears, though he was still incredulous that any girl should think him worth bothering about. While her stupidity had just about ruined his life, it was impossible to be angry with a woman who seemed to think he was wonderful.

"All right, perhaps you've done the best thing for me," he said consoling-

ly. "Don't you think any more about it. Just go back to the office and let this be a lesson to you. Don't ever play *dea ex machina* again."

"What's *dea ex machina?*" asked Annabel, looking up like a kindergarten child.

"A goddess from the machine; in your case, monkeying with a buzz-saw. I'll get me another job, and I'll be obliged if you don't try to understudy Fate again."

"I acted entirely on impulse," she said pathetically.

"Then control your impulses. Anybody else whom you treated as you did me might make serious trouble for you. How old are you?"

"Twenty-three," she said meekly.

"You look younger, even with the glasses. What was your training for motion-picture reviewing?"

"Why, I don't know. I always liked pictures, and it seemed easy to write about them. I just got into it by accident. I was secretary to the city editor of the *Planet*, and I used to help out the picture critic when she had three or four openings at once. I seem to have an instinct for accurate criticism."

"I've read your stuff. It's always either unbalanced rhapsody or silly abuse."

She looked hurt, but she defended herself.

"Anyway, the *Globe* likes it, and it's a better job than exchange editor. I'm not brilliantly educated, like you, but I think I make a lot more of what I have got."

"You certainly do," admitted Dan. "Well, I forgive you. I make all allowances for your youth and inexperience, and I appreciate the spirit in which you called on me. Good-by."

"What are you going to do?" she asked eagerly.

"I don't know."

"When you do find something, will you write me what it is?"

Dan threw back his head and laughed with great good humor. "I certainly will not. If you didn't happen to like it, you might get me fired again."

"I won't. Honestly, I won't. I realize now what a monstrous thing it was for me to do. Please, you will let me know! I'm so interested. I expect so much from you."

"You're going to be disappointed. When I find something that I think will please you, I'll write. Good-by."

"Good-by," she said reluctantly.

DAN opened the door for her, shook her hand, and watched her down the steps. He returned to his room in an entirely different frame of mind from that in which he had descended.

His sense of humor, long dormant, was working, and he fully appreciated the amusing side of the disaster which had occurred to him. There was a curious and unaccustomed feeling of warmth in his heart at the thought that the strange girl had committed this outrage because she was truly interested in his welfare.

While such interest was highly perilous, it was nevertheless something that another human being had singled him out for attention. Why, maybe he was not such a hopeless case as he had assumed himself to be. This girl liked him enough to weep about him, and she seemed to find something in him to admire. It might be a good thing if he found it himself.

Dan had no heart to set out that day in search of work. He had some money in the bank, enough to keep him for a few months if necessary, and he

dreaded the ordeal of looking for a job, a feeling which is shared by every job hunter, no matter how audacious he may be under ordinary conditions. He took from his bookshelves a volume of Livy, drew a chair up to the window, and tried to read; but his own situation drew his attention from the military strategy of Hannibal at Cannae.

He must get work, and all he knew was the newspaper business. His knowledge of the newspaper business was pitifully small, when he came to consider it; he was not a reporter or a desk man or a solicitor; he was only an exchange editor, and vacancies in those departments were rare in the newspaper game.

There was another angle to be considered. While Annabel's interference was quite without justification and her methods abominable, she had got him ejected from the position on the *Globe* because she thought it was unworthy of him. There was no reason, of course, why he should take her into consideration; yet, what would she think of him if he flopped into another job just like the last one? She would conclude that she had made a mistake in considering him able and intelligent. Somehow he didn't want Annabel to lose the good opinion of him that she had quite unwarrantedly formed.

Dan threw down the book. His solid jaw thrust itself forward; his hands clenched. He would not go back to an exchange desk, no matter what happened to him. After all, there were millions of occupations. There were ditches to be dug. With all the talk of unemployment, Dan knew from his wide reading of newspapers that very few people ever starved to death.

Why was he afraid of people? Why did he shrink from strangers? He was a bigger man than the average; he thought he was more intelligent than most of them. He couldn't be so unprepossessing when as pretty a girl as Annabel Ferguson found him worth bothering her head about. He was a big cowardly goof, that's what he was! The girl had done him a good turn, at that, in yanking him out of his cage. He would show her now that she had not made a mistake about him.

He jammed his hat on his head and went out into the street.

CHAPTER IV.

FORCIBLY HIRED.

THE impulsive Annabel Ferguson, with the optimism of the very young, had assumed that Dan Greer, after being blown out of his shelter, would turn into a belligerent go-getter and shoot up to success like a rocket. She had seen many such instances of character metamorphosis in the movies. That was the way it always happened—in the movies. Dan Greer, however, found during the next fortnight that a lifetime of meekness and moral timidity was not to be overcome immediately by a resolution to demonstrate to a certain young lady that he had stuff in him.

Dan's manner of applying for a job made it impossible for him to secure it. He was tongue-tied, overcome by false shame, and shrank like a huge freckled violet. He successfully convinced the few employers who interviewed him that he would never do. After each turn-down he retreated to his lodging and steeped himself in gloom, and did not secure sufficient courage to start out again for another forty-eight hours. Being perfectly aware of the cause of his failures, he

would set forth with gleaming eye and high determination, only to wilt each time at the crucial moment.

He had read somewhere of a defense made by an Irish soldier charged with cowardice under fire. "Sure, my heart is as brave as any man's," said the soldier, "but my cowardly legs ran away with my body."

In Dan's case the body was brave enough, but the kink in his brain carried it out of fire. It is possible that, in the course of months of self-discipline, he might have overcome his shyness and lack of assurance, to land somewhere as a filing clerk or librarian or such; but Fate came to his assistance.

He had returned about two thirty in the afternoon, after an unsuccessful interview with the man in charge of employment in a big advertising agency, and was on his way upstairs when he was summoned to the telephone in the lower hall.

"Mr. Greer," said an agreeable contralto voice, "were you recently editor of the *Globe?*"

"Yes, madam, I was."

"This is Miss Constance Fairmont speaking. Do you happen to be looking for employment?"

Dan's heart gave a leap.

"It happens that I am," he said.

"Good. Can you call at my apartment in an hour or so? It's possible I can offer you something."

"I certainly can," he assured her.

She gave him an address in the East Seventies.

Some sixty minutes later he was giving his name to the telephone operator in the lobby of a very ornate apartment building around the corner from Park Avenue. He was immediately told to ascend to Apartment 4 B.

Dan was still many weeks from want, but it was painful to be drawing on his savings for his living expenses, and his hopes were high. Surely, since these people had sent for him, there was an excellent prospect of employment. If he failed this time it would be entirely his own fault.

HE pressed the bell at 4 B, fighting off an attack of stage fright; and when the door was opened by a trim colored maid he gave his name in a voice which shook a little.

"Right this way, sir," said the maid, and preceded him into a very striking salon. It was a room thirty-five feet long by twenty feet wide and two stories high. The rough plaster walls were painted a dark red; on the polished floor was a huge red rug of expensive quality; there was a grand piano of rosewood, furniture of the type known as *art nouveau,* and a gigantic futuristic tapestry which hung upon the great expanse of wall at the right. Opposite the entrance was a huge studio window, and above his head was a balcony from which bedrooms opened.

"Take a seat, sir," said the maid. "Miss Fairmont will be down in a minute."

He seated himself self-consciously and inspected his surroundings. This was one of those enormously expensive duplex apartments of which he had heard but never seen. Its owner must be a person of great wealth to afford it. What on earth did such a person want of him? Who had told her about him? What sort of employment could she have for him?

A step on the stair drew his eyes to the staircase, down which was coming a young woman. She was tall, very slender, very graceful, and so beauti-

ful that Dan instantly grew very nervous. She was dark, her hair parted in the middle, her complexion olive, her profile very regular, and her costume subdued.

She reached the bottom of the stairs and came toward him, and he rose and faced her expectantly. On the stairs he had thought her a young girl, but he realized now that she must be nearly thirty. Her eyes were black and very bright and penetrating, and the smile with which she greeted him was brilliant as crystal and just as hard.

"So you are Mr. Greer," she said pleasantly. "You are not quite what I expected."

Of course not, thought poor Dan. He never did appear to be what they expected.

"I'm sorry," he stammered, coloring involuntarily. "I'll leave at once."

"No, no! Sit down."

Dan flopped back into his chair. Miss Fairmont seated herself a few feet away and crossed her legs with embarrassing disregard for the emotions of a modest man. She put the tips of her long fingers together, and her dark eyes stabbed him like twin rapiers.

She laughed, a tinkling melodious laugh.

"I supposed you were a dried-up shrimp of an old man, and you are young and good-looking and big. Are you really Daniel Greer?"

He nodded. She was kidding him, of course, but he would have to stand for it. He needed a job.

"And you were exchange editor of the *Globe* for a long time—years, I believe. Just what did you do?"

Dan could talk well about his work, and he explained it in detail, observing that she listened with interest.

"I was informed," she said when he had finished, "that you were a timid, hermitlike person, interested only in your work. That you had no friends, and never went anywhere and never talked. You talk pretty well."

She had succeeded in putting him at his ease, and Dan returned her smile.

"Whoever told you about me had it right. I'm a queer fish, I suppose. I don't get along with people, and I make friends badly."

"Then you have no temptation to be indiscreet. You wouldn't be likely to discuss your work."

"NOBODY has ever been interested in the kind of work I do," he said bitterly. "May I ask who told you about me? Was it Miss Ferguson?"

"No, I don't believe I know her. It was one of your reporters, an acquaintance of mine. I happened to mention an idea I had, and asked him if he knew of any one capable of carrying it out. He said you had just left the *Globe,* and he didn't believe you would ever get another job. He didn't seem to have much respect for you, Mr. Greer."

"I don't believe I have ever done anything to earn respect. I'm a misfit, Miss Fairmont," he said dolefully. "I don't want to have you hire me under false pretenses."

"If that's the way you apply for work, I doubt very much if you will ever get any," she said with an amused glance. "However, for my purposes, I think you will serve very well. How much were you paid by the *Globe?*"

"Forty-five a week."

"Shocking. I'll give you sixty dollars."

Dan looked dazed.

"I—I might not be worth it," he protested.

"If you're not, I'll find out soon enough. Now let me explain the work. I'm not a lady of leisure, as you may suppose. I support all this by an unique profession. I am a social agent. I have been very successful, and I am going into business in a bigger way; and that is where you come in."

"Social agent?" he exclaimed. "I couldn't possibly be a social secretary or anything like that."

"There, there, don't be frightened," she soothed. "You are not going to meet a soul. You are going to be in business as a clipping bureau—the Greer Clipping Bureau. What do you think of that?"

"I—I just don't get you."

"You shall. I shall hire an office for you and furnish it and set you up in business. The bureau will be a little different from ordinary clipping bureaus. You will clip only items relating to people of wealth or social position or both. Your clippings will be turned over to me, and I shall use them for two purposes—to supply me with information necessary to me in my business and to enable me to pay the expenses of the bureau by selling clippings to the people whom they concern. Do you think you can handle such work?"

"It's what I've been doing all my life."

"Very well. I want you to go home and make a list of the principal newspapers and magazines of the world. How many newspapers do you think we need, to give us the complete news of the United States?"

"I think a hundred and fifty to two hundred newspapers would more than cover the country. You don't have to bother about the small town and village journals, because the big city newspapers in each district have correspondents who cover the social affairs of the smaller places."

"I didn't know that. You see, you are invaluable already."

DAN fairly swelled with pride. "I can read French," he suggested tentatively, "and can get the meaning of Spanish and Italian news items."

"Lovely. We shall want the chief papers of London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Madrid, and Vienna; and the fashion magazines and specialty magazines—whatever deals mainly with people of wealth and social prominence. You can omit politics, crime—except where it deals with social personages—strikes, labor news, editorials and such things; but I am particular about births and deaths in families of wealth and social position. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly," he assured her.

"Very well. I shall have an office for you to-morrow. Call me in the morning, and we shall meet there, and you shall tell me what you need in the way of filing cabinets, and all that. I think we are going to be a success, you and I."

Dan's eyes sparkled. "This job was made to order for me," he declared. "I certainly hope that the information I compile will be worth what it costs you, Miss Fairmont."

"I'm sure it will. Your salary starts immediately. And there is something very important. This clipping bureau is to appear to be your enterprise, not mine. You will tell your friends you are in business for yourself. You won't mind that."

"I'll be very proud," he declared. "I never expected to be in business for myself."

"Well, my connection is strictly between ourselves. It would injure me socially if I were known to be connected with trade. Some of my clients might resent it."

"You can rely absolutely upon my discretion, Miss Fairmont."

She rose, and Dan realized that the interview was at an end and bowed himself out. He was happier than he had ever been in his life, so far as he could remember. To be at the work he loved, drawing a good salary, sitting in his own office, with his name on the glass door! Those fellows down at the *Globe* who considered him beneath their notice would be forced to respect him now.

And one person would be glad, Annabel Ferguson.

As the weeks had passed and he found no occupation, Dan had been nursing a grievance against the girl who had been so certain that he would succeed if ousted from his cubby-hole on the *Globe* that she had brought a false charge against him to get him out.

Now, what had just happened justified her conduct. Annabel was right. He ought to have had sense enough to leave the paper long ago; there was no future there for him. He had been a shy, timid boob; and Annabel had come along, realized his potentialities, and put him in the way of making something of himself. From now on, let people watch his smoke!

Miss Fairmont went to the piano after his departure and played fairly well a few pages of "Rhapsody in Blue." She broke off suddenly, laughed aloud, crossed to the telephone, and called a number. When the party answered she said gayly:

"I've just seen this Greer person, Bill. He's absolutely ideal. A simple, honest, faithful young boob. Just exactly what the doctor ordered. . . . No, not a chance in the world; probably the only man in New York who would not. Good-by, dear."

CHAPTER V.

A SECRETIVE BUSINESS WOMAN.

"HOW does it happen," demanded the publisher of the New York *Globe*, "that such important posts as motion-picture editors are in the hands of young girls? You ask me to pay this Ferguson young woman a hundred dollars a week, which makes her one of the highest salaried persons on the editorial staff. Is she worth it? Can't we get somebody to do her work for less money?"

Mr. Avery, the managing editor, chuckled, and wagged his head. "She is worth it, and it would cost us circulation to replace her. The girl motion-picture critic, boss, is the result of a grave error of judgment committed by nearly all newspapers, fifteen or eighteen years ago. Pictures came in on gum shoes. They started in vacant stores and gradually rose to occupy old and discredited theaters. For years they didn't realize the value of advertising, and they got no reviews; didn't know enough to ask for them.

"Gradually the business grew until the time came when they began to put advertisements in the newspapers, but for a long time after that they were satisfied to be i g n o r e d editorially. Finally their advertising increased until they commenced to plead for editorial attention. Naturally they came within the province of the dramatic editor, who, of course, wouldn't be found dead at a picture show. I remember when Gif Morton, our dra-

matic editor, used to bring me tickets for three or four film shows and ask me to find somebody on the city staff who would condescend to accept them and scribble a few lines about the entertainment."

Avery grinned, and continued: "I couldn't find a reporter who would accept them, and I got into the habit of bulldozing stenographers or telephone operators to take them and come back and tell their impressions to a rewrite man.

"Finally the dramatic editor demanded an assistant to cover films, and I hired a girl for him who received eighteen dollars per week. We were all blind as bats about pictures, I admit it. In a few years our revenue from film exhibitors was equal to our total receipts from theaters, but still we treated them like stepchildren. They were pretty awful as entertainment, and had we been assigning competent critics to review them, they would have torn them to pieces. But the girls who were on the job, not having much more intelligence than the public, enjoyed the pictures and wrote enthusiastically about them.

"In the course of time films began to take quarter page, half page, and even full page ads, compared to ten or fifteen inches taken by legitimate theaters, and we began to consider assigning good men to handle the editorial end of the pictures. Say, these fellows got in wrong with the film business from the start. They were completely out of tune with it and with the public which attended pictures. We had to fall back on the girls who had begun in the game and who had made a reputation as picture critics. When Elise Gordon, who had held down our picture department for ten years, took a film job and walked out on us, I hired Annabel Ferguson away from the *Planet*. The child actually had a following, and our circulation jumped the instant her name began to appear."

"Her stuff is terrible," protested the publisher.

"To you, perhaps, but not to our readers. A hundred thousand people go to the film she recommends, and stay away from the picture she condemns. She is half baked, but so are motion pictures. We need her in our business; the *Universe* has offered her a hundred dollars a week, and we have to meet their bid to keep her."

"It's a crime to pay that baby a hundred a week, but use your own judgment," sighed the publisher.

"I agree with you, but she gets it."

And that's how Annabel Ferguson was persuaded to remain with the *Globe*. The conference between the publisher and managing editor took place the same day which was distinguished by the opening of the Greer Clipping Bureau.

WITH the note from the managing editor announcing that her demand for increased salary had been met, Annabel received an official announcement from Dan Greer of his establishment in business. She got a thrill from the first letter, and a bigger thrill from the second.

Annabel was given to acting upon impulse and regretting her action at leisure, and she had worried a lot about the fate of Dan Greer, who had lost his job through her machinations. She was unable to explain to herself her state of mind about Dan. Until the evening in the cafeteria he had never paid the slightest attention to her, and she realized that their conversation in the restaurant was due, not to any personal appeal she had for him, but to

the fact that she had asked for information upon a subject which happened to interest him.

There was something pathetic about Dan which attracted her to him—an appeal to her maternal instinct, no doubt. When they parted that night she considered herself much better acquainted with him than the facts warranted, and she had breezed over to the morgue next day expecting to carry on from that imaginary point. Dan had drawn back into his shell, and it was evident to her that he had no intention of being drawn out again.

It seemed to her monstrous that such an attractive and talented man should be content with such a job, and she thought about that a lot. Finally, passing the office of the managing editor one day, and seeing him unoccupied, she had entered upon impulse and made her charge against Dan without fully realizing the enormity of her accusation. Afterward she had been overwhelmed by the outrage she had committed and petrified at the thought of the result.

Her sense of decency forced her to present herself at his residence and make her confession, and she came away comforted by his attitude; but she had suffered very much while she waited for word from him which would justify her conduct toward him. As weeks passed, the incident grew more clear instead of indistinct, and she lost a lot of sleep wondering what was going to become of him. She wanted very much to see him and encourage him, but his dismissal of her had been pretty definite. In the beginning Annabel had been attracted by the personality of Dan Greer, and her own action had forced her to think a lot about him; and when a young girl thinks a lot about a man, the next thing she knows she may be in love with him.

The official announcement of the success of Dan Greer relieved her mind of a burden of anxiety. Now that she was exonerated of doing him a great injury, she went about her work with more cheerfulness. If Dan had written her a personal letter she would have answered it, either in person or by note; but the official announcement might either mean that he wanted to see her, or that he was content merely to let her know in this way that he had profited by her action.

She determined that the first time she was in the neighborhood of the Rex Building on Fifth Avenue she would drop in on him and congratulate him. In the meantime there were a lot of film openings, and she had to work harder to justify her raise in salary. So it was ten days before Annabel pushed open the door of the office of the Greer Clipping Bureau.

THINGS were going very well with Dan. Miss Fairmont had chosen him an office upon the sixteenth floor with a great window which admitted plenty of sunlight, whereas he had been accustomed on the *Globe* to work by artificial light. He had a big flat-topped desk, a complete battery of filing cabinets, book racks, newspaper racks, everything dear to the heart of a librarian. His name was on the door of the office. There was a drawing account to the credit of the Greer Clipping Bureau in the ornate bank across Fifth Avenue, and the newspapers subscribed for were coming in and keeping him busy.

He only had half as much to do as he had had on the *Globe*, and more time to do it in. There was no longer the necessity of shooting out ten col-

umns a day of small items properly headlined for "fillers."

He had leisure to read the papers and magazines carefully, and there was no danger of his overlooking, due to pressure, the sort of items needed by his employer.

He had a typewriter, plenty of stationery, a huge supply of large manila envelopes for filing, paste, shears, supplies beyond the dreams of a newspaper exchange editor. His ego, starved for years until it was almost dead of malnutrition, had begun to rear its head; it fed upon the sign on the door, the approval of Miss Fairmont, and the responsibility she had given him. Her casual remark that he was a big, strong, good-looking young man had not escaped it, and it whispered to Dan that he wasn't such a poor thing as he had always supposed himself to be.

He bought a new suit of clothes, the first in two years, and some good shirts and ties. He was beginning to pay a little attention to his appearance, always neglected in the past, and he hoped that some day he might encounter Annabel Ferguson and display to her admiring eyes the person he had become.

Another man would have written to Annabel a frank letter telling of his good fortune and his gratitude to her for the result of her direct action in his behalf; but Dan wasn't self-confident enough for that sort of thing as yet. He had considered it, but he remembered that she was a pretty girl who was possessed, no doubt, of many men friends, a mad little creature whose impulses were forgotten as soon as they were obeyed, and it was more than likely that she was no longer interested in his welfare.

At his employer's suggestion he had a hundred announcements printed of the inauguration of the business, which were mailed to stationers, clipping bureaus in the leading cities, and newspapers; and he sent one to Annabel.

At the end of a week Miss Fairmont visited the office, and inspected the contents of a couple of hundred envelopes which he had already begun to fill, and complimented him upon his system and his thoroughness. He had flushed with pleasure and satisfaction.

"Just how far do you wish me to go?" he asked. "Do you want envelopes on persons just coming into prominence? For example, here is an item from the Butte *Intelligence:* 'The sale of the Three Trees Copper Mine to the Anaconda Company has just been completed. It is said that Luke P. Hardman, the owner, has received two and a half million dollars for his controlling interest in the Three Trees, and plans to take his family for a trip around the world.' This Hardman is some old prospector, no doubt, who had built up a great mine and is now cashing in; but he certainly isn't a social prospect, and there may never be another line in a newspaper about him."

"MAKE an envelope on him by all means," she instructed. "It says he has a family, and the family of a Western miner always wants to come to New York. The Hardmans may turn out to be profitable clients for me some day. It's just such items that I want you to discover."

"All right. Now, how about this one? 'Reginald Leffingwell, forty-five years old, a New York multimillionaire, committed suicide in Paris on

June 27. He has been in bad health for several years, and despondency was the cause of his action. He leaves a widow, Mrs. Edna Leffingwell, and two children, Harold and Helen, who are twenty-six and twenty-two years old, respectively.'"

"Make an envelope of that."

"But he's dead. It's the end of him as far as publicity is concerned."

"True; but mark the envelope Edna, Harold, and Helen Leffingwell. They will be heard from, you may be sure."

"All right. I have cut out all such items, but wished to talk to you about them before filing them. I'm hanged if I can see what use they are to you, Miss Fairmont."

"Don't bother your head about that," the young woman answered good-naturedly. "My business is a peculiar one, and I'm not going to confide my methods to you. Just keep on clipping and compiling data about such people."

"I beg your pardon, I didn't mean—"

She smiled. "Don't be alarmed, I'm not offended."

"Well, here's another thing. I have about a hundred clippings upon the reception given by the James R. Boltons to the President of the United States on his passage through Chicago. We might sell Bolton the clippings at five cents a clipping if we write to him about them now."

"That's five dollars. I wouldn't trouble. In a few months, when we have a big collection, we'll begin to think of that angle of the business. Is there anything else you need here?"

"I'm fixed marvelously. By the way, I've clipped a lot of stuff about the robbery at the country house of the F. Stanley Middletons at Southampton, day before yesterday. If we go in for that sort of stuff, we'll soon need another office for a storeroom."

"Throw away everything except one article describing the thing in detail," she ordered. "Good morning, Mr. Greer. I think you are doing splendidly."

"There's a woman for you," thought Dan. "Crisp and businesslike as a man. Knows what she wants; doesn't hesitate to make a decision. Beautiful, too, but doesn't seem to think about it. I bet she makes an awful lot of money to be able to pay the expenses of this business. Wonder how she makes it? Never heard of a social agent before. She put me in my place, and didn't make me uncomfortable when she did it."

He attacked a pile of newspapers, and was quickly absorbed in his work.

CHAPTER VI.

HOLLYWOOD DIPLOMATS.

HECTIC is the life of a motion-picture editor. New York is the selling center of the film business, just as Hollywood is its manufacturing headquarters, and to start a picture properly on its career a big New York opening has to be arranged.

During the week or two preceding such an opening, the press is showered with attentions. Luncheons, dinners, teas and parties of every sort are on the schedule at which the various principals and the director and the supervisor and the technical man and all sorts of film luminaries are given a chance to make a personal impression upon the newspaper folks.

New York City, also, is a way station between Hollywood and Paris,

where all picture stars go when they get a vacation, and it is the custom to throw a farewell party for each important star on the eve of sailing and a welcome home jamboree upon his or her return. In addition to attending eight or ten film openings per week, Annabel Ferguson was invited to twenty or thirty parties, and so much fuss was made over her when she did appear at such functions that it is a wonder she didn't suffer from delusions of grandeur.

Annabel, however, had a sensible streak in her many-sided character, and did not allow press agents and affable film celebrities to influence her judgment of what was worth while on the screen and what wasn't. She didn't drink, champagne didn't tempt her, flattery disgusted her, and the publicity gentry had her marked as a tough nut.

While Dan Greer thought her reviews were worthless, and while the publisher of the *Globe* insisted that they were terrible, she happened to look at pictures as the vast majority of picture fans looked at them, and what she wrote usually confirmed or was confirmed by their judgment, which caused them to swear by her. Hence her dictum had a lot to do with the success or failure of a picture.

Now, it happened that a great director in Hollywood had just completed a tremendously expensive film epic which might be accepted by the public as the last word in screen masterpieces, and might be rejected as a lot of pretentious blah. In the first case it would make a million over its cost for the producer, and in the second case it would lose him a million and a half.

This film, which was called "The Immortal Soul," was a great spectacle which began in the Garden of Eden and ended in a clinch in a night club in New York. It combined all the best or the worst features, depending upon who was quoted, of "Intolerance," "King of Kings," "Ten Commandments," "Birth of a Nation," "Four Horsemen," and current successes. It had taken Serge Glendenning a year and a half to make, and it would either put that independent director-producer at the top of the profession or it would ruin him.

When he had completed the cutting of the film, Glendenning wasn't sure himself just what he had on his hands. He hoped it was a great picture—there was every reason it should be—but somehow it didn't satisfy him.

He had come East with the film, and he was now in conference at the New York office of Glendenning Productions with his business manager, his head salesman, his financial backer, and his press agent, after a very private showing of the picture.

"Well," he said defiantly, "you've seen it. What have we got? Latham, you tell us."

LATHAM was the press agent, supposed to be the cleverest showman in the game, and was paid a thousand dollars a week to exploit this production. He was a tall, thin man, horse-faced, with big pouches under his eyes which were small, black, and cunning, and he had a shock of iron-gray hair.

"Well, boss," Latham said hesitatingly, "it's one of those things. You've got some marvelous stuff in it, best I ever saw, but the story is not very coherent. What the heck has the destruction of Troy got to do with the love affairs of this chorus girl in New York? I know—symbolism and all

that sort of bunk. It may go over. They've eaten up worse junk than this; but it's all in the way you feed it to them."

"Then you think we have a chance?" asked the producer eagerly.

"If it goes big in New York I can get our price for it all over the country," declared the business manager. "I'm telling you it's stupendous. It's the greatest picture I ever saw, even if I don't know what it's all about."

"There you are," declared Latham. "What's it about? You had a good, straightforward story when you started, boss. but it's got all cluttered up with spectacle so you can hardly follow it. You'd have a good story if you cut out all the big shots."

"But we couldn't sell it for a big price then," said the business manager. "No, we got to keep the stupendous business in. Cut out the story if necessary."

"If the public would only approach it in the right attitude!" pleaded Glendenning. "It's all in the treatment of it. You can make or break this picture, Latham. You're the highest salaried press agent in America. Make good!"

Latham lit a cigar and puffed out big clouds of white smoke. "This thing has got to be approached reverently," he declared. "They have to check their sense of humor at the door. It won't stand kidding. I'll use the 'bated breath' method of ballyhoo. I'll want you to meet the critics, boss, and get them all hopped up about your divine inspiration. I'll have the public mind rightly framed for the opening; but whether the thing goes over or not depends upon one doll-baby named Annabel Ferguson."

"You mean that pretty child with the cheaters?" laughed Glendenning. "I've met her. She's nobody. Put a penny in her hand and tell her to run and buy a stick of candy."

"Take that attitude and you can burn up your film, boss. Annabel is the people's voice. She makes up New York's mind for it about films. They follow her blindly. If she says, 'How grand! How glorious! How stimulating! How noble!'—then you've got a gold mine. If Annabel says, 'I couldn't make head or tail out of it and I think it's simply a bore,' then just ask the orchestra to play Chopin's Funeral March."

"Evidently we are in the hands of Miss Ferguson," said Glendenning. "What shall we do about it?"

"Slip her a piece of change," suggested the crude business manager.

"You wouldn't understand, Rawson, but this kid is absolutely on the level and she's one of the girl critics that won't respond to kind treatment."

"How do you think she will like the picture?" asked the producer.

"She's a matter-of-fact little person, not likely to be impressed by magnificent historical shots of a lot of chariots and spears and falling walls and funeral pyres. She'll be bewildered by all that and want to know what the story is. If she had seen the run-off just now, she would have told you the picture was a dud."

"And you really believe that her verdict will be generally accepted?" asked the producer, with a frown.

"I told you she made up the minds of the picture fans."

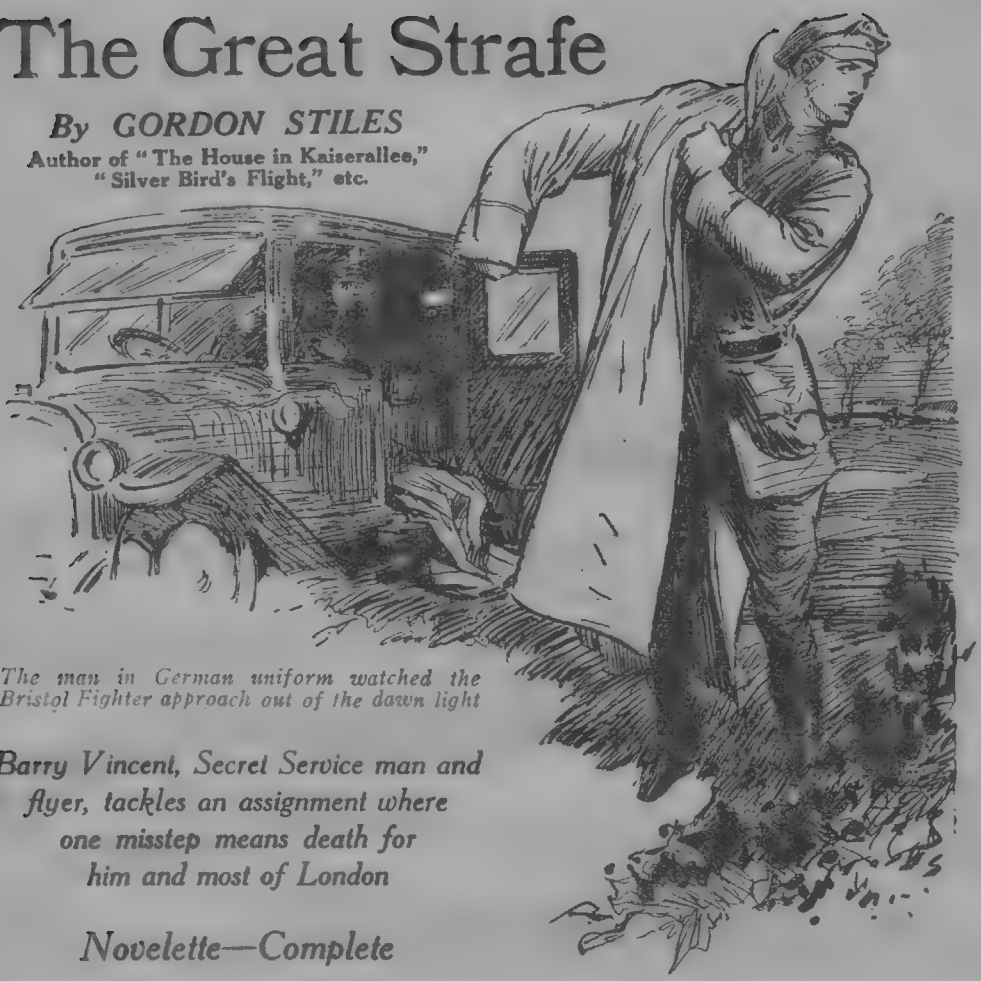
"Very good," said Glendenning. "It's up to you to change her mind."

"And that's what I want to see you about privately," replied Latham.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

The Great Strafe

By GORDON STILES
Author of "The House in Kaiserallee," "Silver Bird's Flight," etc.



The man in German uniform watched the Bristol Fighter approach out of the dawn light

Barry Vincent, Secret Service man and flyer, tackles an assignment where one misstep means death for him and most of London

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

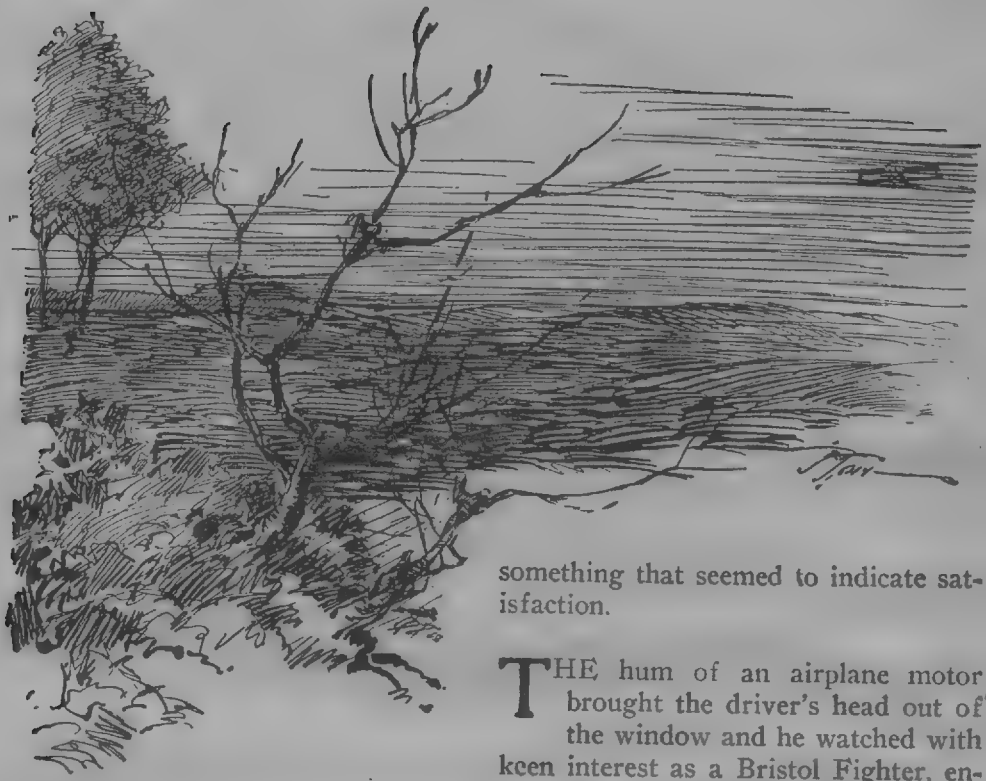
DAWN TAKE-OFF.

TWO hours before dawn, on a May morning in 1917, a gray military motor car slipped silently through the darkened streets of southwest London, crossed Westminster Bridge and sped away to the south. The driver was dressed in the uniform of a British Tommy while the other occupant of the car was covered to the chin by an officer's khaki's great-coat.

There was no conversation as the machine whirled over the deserted highways and it was not until a point not far from Godalming, Surrey, had been reached that the officer ordered the car halted. He stepped out, stretched and lighted a cigarette. He yawned, gazed critically at the sky, consulted the luminous dial of his wrist watch. "We're plenty early," he observed.

The driver murmured, "Yes, sir. Do you mind if I smoke, sir?"

"Go ahead," returned the other and the private fished out the inevitable Woodbine.



The smokes had been finished and the officer had tramped for ten minutes back and forth on a short impromptu beat before the light from the reddening eastern sky caused surrounding objects to take on their normal aspects.

The car, it could be seen, stood at the edge of a broad, vacant field that bordered the road from which it was separated by a low hedge. On the far side of the area a scribble of trees showed against the lightening horizon, but no houses were to be seen in any direction. The officer who had walked with lowered head, as if deep in thought, now straightened up and peered alertly about. Then he cocked his ear heavenward and murmured something that seemed to indicate satisfaction.

THE hum of an airplane motor brought the driver's head out of the window and he watched with keen interest as a Bristol Fighter, engine cut off, came sliding down through the dim light to a perfect landing in the roadside field.

Thereupon the officer removed his cap and overcoat, and tossed them into the rear of the car, from which he drew another headpiece which he substituted for the one he had discarded. The change having been made, he stood forth clad in the uniform of a lieutenant of the Imperial German Air Service!

Stepping through the hedges, he hurried to where the pilot was just getting down from the cockpit. The latter, however, wore the regulation garb of the Royal Flying Corps.

"Damned good connection, Ledyard," greeted the man in the German

togs. He spoke with a recognizably American accent. "I haven't been here more than twenty-five minutes."

"I hoped to make it promptly at daybreak. Less chance of your being noticed. Even a dumb farmer's lad might open his mouth in the wrong place. How do you feel, old man? Fit and all?"

"Splendid," the other assured him.

"It's no end sporting of you," offered Pilot-Ledyard. "Takes a bit of nerve to take on a job like this."

"Shucks, I don't look for any trouble. And I hope to be back—somehow—in three or four days. See you then. Now I'll be on my way."

They shook hands. The gray-uniformed figure climbed aboard and a moment later the somewhat dilapidated Bristol sped down the field to an easy take-off. The former pilot got into the motor and rolled away toward London.

Shaping his course for Dover, Captain Barry Vincent, once of the United States Secret Service, but for some two years an officer of the R. F. C., gave considerable serious thought to the business in hand, as he masterfully handled the Bristol. He was off on a desperate mission and he knew it.

Now that a combination of spying and flying ability was called for, the choice had fallen upon the Yank. His faultless German, and the fact that he resembled somewhat one Herr Leutnant Max von Wehlau who was fighting the war from the prison camp at Donnington Hall, contributed also to Barry's selection. The young man was, in fact, wearing von Wehlau's own uniform, which, with a bit of tailoring, had turned out a good fit.

Vincent had committed to memory the fairly complete military and family history of the prisoner which the British, with characteristic patience, had dug up. The German's identity disk hung inside his shirt. If he met with no one who had known Wehlau well, he ought to get by, he thought.

The thing had to be done. For ten days, reports of fresh Zeppelin activity had trickled into the offices of the British Air Intelligence. From twelve to twenty new ships were known to have left the works at Friedrichshafen, and it was believed that these were concentrating somewhere in Belgium for a monster attack on either London or Paris.

Whatever the program might be, it was some novel threat, the authorities felt, because for almost a year, the Zeppelins had been lying low after the hot receptions they had received from French and British flyers. They must have something up their sleeve, these Germans. Something new and probably of a disagreeable nature.

Daily the British and French had looked for information from Henri Bayon who conducted the Allied Intelligence clearing house in Brussels. But no word had come; a cylinder was missing in the secret service engine. And at a most inconvenient time.

Somebody had to go and find out what was in the wind. Somebody had to play a double-header—find out what was wrong with Bayon, and far more important, learn where those Zeps were and what they were going to do.

Barry Vincent had been tagged.

CHAPTER II.

SUSPICION.

BARRY climbed steadily as he flew eastward, but the old crate wasn't too good. The best he could make was slightly over twelve thousand feet, and at that altitude he passed over

Dover. The visibility was unusually good for which he was thankful. A part of his plan was to fall in with the German dawn patrol out of Ostend; the sooner he located it the better. To be sure, Ostend was not the point for which he was making, but it would look strange if an escaped prisoner did not land at the nearest possible spot within his own lines.

Barry went over the salient points in the story he would tell, kept his eyes open for German machines. And he found them all right—found them with a vengeance.

The spat of bullets in his fuselage, the splintering of struts and bedrail, steel whining past his ears supplied the evidence!

Barry jumped; he hadn't seen a thing. Now he nosed down instinctively; half-rolled out of range. He levelled out, then put the Bristol into a gently climbing turn. At the same time he rose in the cockpit, flung both hands above his head and brought them to his sides in a wide, sweeping gesture.

This maneuver had the desired effect. Glancing about, Barry saw two Fokkers bearing down upon him, but they were not jockeying for firing position. He flattened out and cruised straight toward Ostend and presently the Fokkers came alongside.

Barry stood up again so that the pilots could see his uniform and motioned to indicate that he would land at Ostend. Whereupon the two machines, their pilots watching him closely, fell in as an escort, one on either side of the old Bristol. They circled about while the American landed, then dropped to the drome where they tumbled excitedly out and joined the crowd hurrying to where the British plane stood.

Arrogantly, Barry ignored the mechanics and other enlisted men who were the first to approach him; stalked past them toward a pop-eyed major who came running from the orderly room.

"What's all this?" demanded the major.

Barry brought up his hand in an excellent German salute. "I am Leutnant von Wehlau, 179th Squadron. I have escaped from Donnington Hall prison in England." Thus Barry broke the news.

"*Mein Gott!*" exclaimed the major, extending his hand. "Come with me, *Herr Leutnant.*" He led the way to the orderly room and Barry found himself the center of a shouting group of officers, each of whom was asking a different question. The major motioned the American to a seat; bellowed for silence.

"Be quiet," he ordered. "Let Leutnant von Wehlau tell his story with intelligence."

"FIRST," begged Barry, "give me food. I have not eaten for two days."

"A thousand pardons!" cried the major and shouted orders which brought orderlies on the run with bread, sausages and wine. Barry fell upon these like a famished wolf, devouring the food greedily while the others waited impatiently for him to talk.

When it appeared to the onlookers that the newcomer had taken the edge off his appetite, Barry said, "I escaped by hiding under a tarpaulin in a provision lorry. For two days, I managed to conceal myself under hedges. But I could get no food and dared not show myself. By night I made my way to an airdrome the name of which I do not know. Fortunately, late yesterday,

this Bristol went bad and the pilot was forced to land a mile or so outside the drome. The mechanics came to make repairs and finished just before dark. They left a guard on the machine for the night and this morning I crept up on him just before dawn, knocked him senseless with a stone and—well, here I am."

There were exclamations of surprise, admiration and glee. The major said, "Come into my room and help me prepare an official report."

Once there, the major used the telephone freely and thirty minutes afterward, the wing commander, Colonel Tauscher, arrived, together with seven or eight other officers. Now, thought Barry, for the grilling.

Grilling it was, sure enough. But the Yankee had his piece down pat, replied promptly and convincingly to all questions put to him. In the end, there seemed to be no doubt of his identity, but there was a long interrogation as to conditions in England.

Here again, Barry was prepared. He unloaded bits of gossip which might easily have filtered into a prison camp. The British, he declared, were utterly unnerved by air raids. There was, he understood, a sufficiency of food and the prisoners were well fed. Barry was careful to say nothing which might conflict with information which he felt sure the Germans already possessed.

In the end, he was assigned a cubicle in the barracks and there was a great show of welcome on the part of the flying officers.

Dinner in the mess that night was more or less of a nightmare. Barry was beset by a feeling of unreality; it seemed impossible that he was sitting there, surrounded by deadly enemies who treated him like a brother.

It occurred to him suddenly that the air held something of tension, of repression. One officer, a Captain Fischer, appeared almost openly hostile, Barry thought. Time and again the American surprised the other watching him with an intentness that held something of skepticism. At least that was how it seemed to Barry. They were waiting, he decided, for reports which would confirm the story he had told. He was on probation. The colonel probably had given orders forbidding the discussion of military matters for the time being.

An occasional cold shiver traversed the Yankee's spine and he snatched at his supposed sufferings as an excuse for retiring early.

HE awoke nervous and jumpy. Shaving with a borrowed razor, he nicked himself twice and as he turned toward the mess for breakfast, Barry Vincent wished himself anywhere in the world except where he was.

He could hardly conceal his surprise and satisfaction when his belated appearance at the mess was greeted with a perfect chorus of cordial greetings. Two or three of the officers at the long table rose and slapped the American on the back. All of them were gay, the major most of all.

"Ha, ha!" exclaimed the latter. "You have given the English swine something to think about! You have not seen the papers, what?"

Barry shook his head, concealing as best he could his wonderment. The major shoved toward him a copy of the *Daily Mail* of that same date, and indicated a short item. Barry accepted the paper, astonished at the system which gave the enemy English prints approximately as early as they reached the hands of Londoners. Airplane to

Holland, he supposed. With a surge of admiration for the British Air Intelligence, he read:

GERMAN PRISONER ESCAPES

Enemy Flyer Outwits Guards at Donnington Hall

Barry read the official Air Ministry report eagerly, concealing his exultation. Now he understood the change of attitude by his supposed fellow-officers. That fake newspaper article had done the trick! The young man breathed a sigh of relief. Now, he felt, he stood some show of getting on with the job.

When he reported to the major, shortly after breakfast, the colonel was present. He, too, appeared extremely cordial and friendly. "Did you have a good rest, *Herr Leutnant?*" he asked pleasantly.

"Excellent, sir," Barry assured him heartily. "I feel in good trim, sir, and hope I may be assigned to duty very soon."

"I expected," said the major, "that you would ask for leave. Your family—"

"Nothing would please me more," declared Barry. Lord! How they were playing into his hands! "I hesitated because I know that the need of pilots is great. But, if I can be spared, I would like to have ten days or two weeks in which to visit my home in Nurnberg, first stopping in Brussels to purchase a new outfit. I can get money by telegraph there."

"By all means," put in the colonel. "Here, major, prepare a two-weeks' pass. I will sign it personally and with pleasure."

Barry murmured his thanks as the precious paper was placed in his hands. And an hour later he picked up a ride on a tender that was headed toward the Belgian capital.

THE tender in which Barry rode had been dispatched, he understood, to bring back a quantity of wines for the commissary at Ostend. The American considered himself in luck to have picked up a ride so expeditiously. He sat with the driver, and a sloppy-looking non-commissioned officer who was supposed to be in charge of the vehicle, tumbled into the rear just before leaving the post. The latter sat, glum and silent, gazing fixedly out through the opening in the back, apparently glad to be separated by a canvas curtain from the occupants of the front seat.

The driver, of course, spoke only when Barry addressed him, which was infrequently enough. The Yankee spy was busy with his thoughts. What would he find in Brussels? Why had not Bayon communicated? Where was the break in the lines of communication?

It was mid afternoon when the tender rolled into Brussels, and Barry was stiff from the jolting incidental to the journey over dilapidated roads. He ordered the driver to set him down near the Hotel Metropole where he hoped to find accommodations.

As he made his way across the street he failed to notice that the tender remained where it had stopped, and that the non-commissioned officer who had occupied the rear part of the vehicle, had stepped out and, from a safe shelter, was watching the late passenger with tense interest.

Barry had no luck in the Metropole; every room was occupied and hundreds were being turned away daily. So he sought the Town Major who, he knew, would find a billet for him. On the

way to the office of that official, he passed an army ordnance depot and there purchased a Luger pistol. He was perfectly safe, he reasoned, but somehow the feel of the weapon against his hip was reassuring.

The Town Major's office was up one flight in a business building and the hall as well as the stairway was cluttered up with a milling crowd of officers, all seeking accommodations. Working his way to the room above, Barry found himself caught in a snarl of flying men on their way, he gathered from snatches of conversation, to the great field at St. Denis Westrem.

They were a friendly lot, mostly youngsters, and Barry seized the opportunity of making casual inquiries which were answered readily enough, but he heard no word regarding the Zeppelins.

When finally the American came up to the desk of the billeting officer, he was rubbing elbows with a pilot who gave his name as Oscar Stoll and who grinned amiably when he and Barry were assigned to the same quarters, in an obscure hotel on a side street. There the two made their way and when they had located their room, Stoll suggested a bottle of wine in the coffee room.

Thus it was after nine o'clock that evening when Barry set out for the spy's house at 48 Rue Mordant—set out with a feeling more of curiosity than fear.

CHAPTER III.

SPY'S HOUSE.

THE American's first step was to purchase an electric torch. The city was but dimly lighted, and otherwise it would be impossible to make out the house numbers. He was not unfamiliar with Brussels and located the Rue Mordant without difficulty.

No. 48 proved to be a two-story brick affair. Having found the place, Barry proceeded to act on the instructions given him at headquarters in London. The house was entirely dark and along one side of it ran a narrow, flag-paved alley. Into this Barry made his way, first glancing about to make sure he was not observed. Feeling along the wall, he came upon a door and mounted the two shallow steps which led up from the street. Then he rapped—once, a pause; twice in quick succession. After a few seconds' wait he repeated the signal.

Instantly there was a sound from within. A bolt slid softly back and the door opened inward a few inches. It was pitch dark inside, but a voice said softly, in French, "Who is it?"

"The man from Louvain," returned Barry, promptly.

"Good," said the unseen party. "Enter, please."

Barry passed through the door which was closed behind him; the bolt was shot home and the Yankee could hear the other man moving about in the darkness. Then, with startling suddenness, a light flashed on.

For a second the American blinked in the bright illumination. But only for a second. What he saw instantly cleared his eyes as well as his mind; for he was looking squarely into the muzzle of a heavy caliber pistol—a German Mauser!

Behind the gun leered the face of Captain Fischer, the officer who had watched Barry so keenly at the mess in Ostend. The captain was not attired in his regular uniform, however. Instead, he wore the garb of a noncommissioned officer, and with a jolt

Barry realized that here was the passenger who had occupied the back of the tender on the journey to Brussels!

"Hands up!" snarled the German. Then, as Barry reached for the ceiling, "Oh, I knew it! They all thought I was a fool. It was easy to find out, however. If you were what I thought you were, you would come here. I gambled on that."

"I haven't any idea what you are talking about," said Barry. It would do no harm to try a bluff although he had no hope of its success.

"We shall not debate that point," said Fischer, evenly. "Turn around; keep your hands high!"

Pressing his weapon into the Yankee's back, Fischer secured the former's gun, then stepped back. "You may drop your hands now," he said.

"Mind if I smoke?" inquired Barry.

"No. You might toss me one of your cigarettes, too," said the captain, amiably. "I think I have earned a smoke."

There was the Prussianism cropping out, Barry thought. Already Fischer was strutting mentally. He tossed over the cigarette, which the other caught expertly in his left hand and to which he applied a match without taking his eyes or gun off his prisoner.

FISCHER blew out a cloud of smoke and said, "This is turning out to be an excellent spy trap. You are the third, my friend."

"Yes?" returned Barry.

"Yes. Bayon faced a firing squad ten days ago. And two days later a Belgian who came prowling about here with funny passwords got his. Normally that would be the end because word would be passed that the game was up. But when you came along, fresh from England, I decided that the bait was still good. I," he finished, complacently, "am of the Intelligence."

"So I gathered," said Barry. "What are you going to do with me?" His brain was humming. What Fischer had said about having been laughed at might indicate that he had set out to play a lone hand in order to crow over his critics. If that were true and the German could be disposed of—

"Come," ordered Fischer. "You will walk ahead of me to the provost marshal's office, and I need not tell you that the slightest false move will mean instant death."

Both of them, Barry thought, would have to withdraw when the door swung back. He reached obediently for the bolt with his right hand, turned the knob and slowly opened the door.

"Enough. Outside," commanded the captain.

Up to now Barry's movements had been deliberate. But his tactics changed as he started for the street. With the speed of lightning, the American's left hand descended with a chopping motion on the light switch at the side of the door. And, as the place was plunged into inky darkness, the prisoner ducked for the alley.

Fischer's gun roared and the bullet fanned the fugitive's cheek. But flight was no part of Barry's plan. Instead, he dropped to one side of the steps and, as Fischer plunged through the opening, the Yank caught his legs.

The German crashed head foremost to the flagstones of the alley. He struck with sickening force and when Barry, with a catlike leap, threw himself upon his adversary, the latter was helpless and silent, save for a slight moaning sound which accompanied his breathing.

With frantic haste, Barry dragged his foe back into the house, shut and

barred the door; turned on the light. Fischer was bleeding from a bad wound on the head; undoubtedly, Barry thought, the man's skull was fractured.

The American worked rapidly. He did not know how far the sound of that shot had carried or how soon it would be investigated. He turned off the light and waited there in the blackness, heart pounding madly and shivers chasing up and down his spine. But the two guns were in his pocket and he was fiercely exultant over the outcome of his encounter.

Five minutes passed. Then there was the measured tramp of hobnailed feet on the stones outside, a subdued rumble of voices. Barry knew what it was—a patrol seeking the source of the shooting. He stood, alert and tense, as the sounds approached. One hand rested on the butt of his Luger. If they came in, he would shoot it out. No brick walls for him!

"But, no. The detail passed without so much as pausing. Evidently, they were uncertain as to where the shot had been fired. And, as they moved on, Barry realized what this meant. Fischer had not been covered on the job—was playing a lone hand.

Barry once more turned on the lights, examined the man on the floor. His lips set grimly as he set about what he knew he had to do. Even at that, he would be facing deadly peril and speed would be all that could save him from the fate which had already overshadowed him that evening.

Rummaging about in the room, Barry found what he sought—a short length of rope. Thrusting aside his natural squeamishness at the proceeding, he knotted the cord tightly about his victim's throat. He could not chance a shot and he could not risk the captain's recovery.

Feeling sick inside, the American snapped out the light, leaving the body dangling. He listened at the door and then let himself quietly into the gloom outside. A quarter of an hour later, he entered the Metropole to find Stoll gloriously intoxicated. The German welcomed Barry as a long-lost brother; and, truth to tell, the latter was not averse to a stiff drink, or a number of them, after—that.

CHAPTER IV.

A DEADLY THREAT.

THE place to which Stoll conducted his companion was going full blast when the pair arrived. The bar was lined three deep, while at a score of tables officers drank and shouted and drank again. To Barry it seemed as if every last person in the establishment was thoroughly binged—in which he was not far out of the way.

He saw, too, that there was a generous sprinkling of naval flying men and he so maneuvered his friend that they were presently lined up close to a knot of these. Which made it easy after a little to include several of them in the order for a drink. Being well supplied with money, Barry encouraged the group to carry on.

Almost at once the American's investment began to earn dividends. There was loose talk a-plenty, good-natured banter between naval and military pilots. And presently a remark was made which brought Barry up on his toes.

An army pilot joined the party, was welcomed by a naval lieutenant as an old friend. The newcomer, after the exchange of greetings, asked, "So you are still here? I thought you would be

in Ghent. When is your great *Strafe* coming off?"

The other shook his head. "Can't say," he replied. "Soon, I think, because a dozen of us have been given four days' Brussels leave. Two days yet to go. But I don't think they know themselves yet. Waiting for something, probably—something at the other end."

"You navy men! We of the army are to busy to go off on picincs!"

The great *Strafe!* Something the naval branch was engineering! Zeppelins! Instantly Barry felt that he was on a hot trail. Ghent was where the mess was brewing, not Bruges where centered most of the naval activity in Belgium.

Which made it all the more plausible. Concentrating Zeppelins in the vicinity of Bruges would be highly dangerous, considering the frequency with which that area was raided by British night bombers. Also, the open spaces about Ghent and the airport of St. Denis Westrum would afford far better facilities for mobilizing such a fleet. Good enough. Barry decided to concentrate on the naval man.

The ripened condition of the lieutenant presently made it easy for Barry to draw him aside and to a seat in one of the stalls which lined the walls.

"Your friend must be mad to call these raids picnics," Barry said.

The other stared at him owlishly, eyes suddenly widening as it broke upon him that here was a champion of the doughty naval airmen.

Barry added, "I certainly wish I could get in on the great *Strafe*."

That was the beginning. Two hours later, Barry had, after making allowances for drunken exaggeration, what he considered a fairly accurate line on the German plans.

At some not distant date, he gathered, Britain was to be treated to an air raid, the like of which no country had ever experienced. A fleet of sixteen to twenty Zeppelins, ships vastly improved over those formerly sent against England, craft that could fly higher and faster than ever before—these were to be sent en masse with scores of tons of powerful bombs destined to demolish a carefully chosen series of objectives.

The lieutenant did not know all of the details; only the admiral in charge of the operation knew those. And probably he had not all of them at hand, because the attack was to be carried out in close coöperation with agents planted in England who had arranged signals which, on the night in question, would reveal the locations of such important places as the Woolwich Arsenal, Bank of England, Post Office, Charing Cross, Cannon and Liverpool Street stations, Waterloo, War Office and Air Ministry, Croydon Barracks and a number of other points where well-directed explosives would work the gravest havoc.

The attack was to be preceded by a monster airplane raid on the Midlands—the first to be attempted by plane on Yorkshire and Lancashire. But this was largely in the nature of a feint to draw the air defense away from the British capital. In fact, rumors of such an intended raid were to be slyly spread so that British Intelligence operatives might pick them up. Thus, the Air Ministry would congratulate itself and send the bulk of available planes north.

The invading planes would do what damage they could, but their main purpose was to draw the teeth of the London defense; and by the time this was accomplished, the Zeps would arrive to carry out their grim program.

Barry shuddered at the thought of what such a raid, if only slightly opposed, would mean to London. His first inclination was to seek a drome, steal a machine and rush back with his information. Then he realized that such a move would mean investigation and a change of plan on the part of the enemy.

No. He must learn when the operation would come off. What was equally important, he must try to find out where the London hook-up was.

CHAPTER V.

PERILOUS BUSINESS.

A LORRY rolled up to the entrance of the great airdrome at St. Denis Westrum. Barry Vincent condescendingly thanked the driver for his lift from Ghent and stalked into the orderly room. The post adjutant, standing before a large wall map, turned inquiringly to face the visitor. Barry saluted in excellent Teutonic style and said, "Is Captain Karl von Wettberg about the station, sir?"

The officer looked doubtful, repeated the name. "I don't think—just a moment. We have such a changing personnel." He flipped the pages of a book, scanned the list of names therein.

"No such officer here," he announced. "Was it something personal?"

"An old friend," Barry explained. "We trained together in Bavaria, and I have not seen him for a long time. I am informed that he is to be assigned to duty here; he may come in to-day. I have been a prisoner in England."

The adjutant looked up with a flash of interest. "You are von Wehlau?" he asked. And when Barry nodded, "I am glad to welcome you, sir. We laughed over the newspaper account of your escape. Congratulations." He extended his hand.

Barry produced his pass. "Would it perhaps be possible for me to find a billet close at hand, sir? I am sure that my friend will be here within a day or two at the most."

"More than possible," said the other, cordially. "We can put you up for as long as you care to remain."

The American was marched in to meet the colonel and a half hour later sat in the welcome solitude of his cubicle, trying to sort matters out intelligently.

It had been a profitable morning, an astounding morning. On the road from Ghent—in the broad open fields—he had come upon what he sought. Perfectly camouflaged hangars of canvas, a score or more of them. And each housing one of the new giant Zeppelins! The mightiest fleet of death and destruction that the war had bred! Nineteen ships, Barry had counted, and about the place an air of bustling activity which presaged important operations.

He knew the enemy's plan; he had seen the ships. The date of the contemplated raid and a clew to the band of spies in London—with these his job would be complete.

But he was worried, damnably worried. How long would it be until the body of Fischer should be discovered? Perhaps it had been found already. Would he, by any chance, be associated with the killing? Had anybody known of Fischer's plans Had the driver of the tender been aware of the captain's mission? On the answers to these questions depended his very life and he could not answer them. At any minute the answer might come in a most un-

pleasant form. Speed and more speed —that was what the situation called for.

As always happens when some special and secret stunt is to be pulled off, the impending foray into England was known to everybody on the station, was openly and freely discussed by every one from the grease monkeys up. Spurred by the need of haste, Barry was not slow to take advantage of the conditions that obtained.

He had been accepted at face value, and prowled at will about the place; asked unending questions, but in a manner sufficiently casual and discreet to avert suspicion.

He roamed far afield to where the big Zep hangars lay, picked up information as to the routine of Admiral Lentz, in charge of the big ships. Most important of all, he learned that the plans dealing with the pending raid were in the admiral's possession and were to be forwarded in a day or two for final approval to headquarters at Bruges. Thus, having used his eyes as well as his ears, Barry concluded that further delay would be dangerous.

THE tide was running high at the Touraine Café in Ghent that evening. Flying officers of both services drank and shouted; Leutnant von Wehlau, who had slipped over a fast one on the English pigs, was toasted repeatedly and responded gracefully, not only verbally, but by the generous purchase of expensive drinks. A prince, this von Wehlau!

The clock had gone eleven when Barry decided that the party had reached a point where it could stand on its own feet. He therefore slipped unostentatiously away and gained the street. Ducking across the main thoroughfare, the Yankee plunged along a deserted course which presently brought him out on the Ghent-Courtrai highway. Less than thirty minutes afterward the temporary naval air station bulked darkly before him in the night.

The office of Admiral Lentz was at one end of the long barrack building which had been set up on stilts because of the low ground on which it stood. And this office, Barry knew, was constantly guarded by a sentry who was posted at the entrance, but who made occasional explorations in the rear of the place as well. This feature, along with several others, had been taken into consideration by the Yankee spy.

Cautiously the young man made a wide detour which brought him to the far end of the building, some ninety feet from where the sentry did his stuff. For a minute he stood, listening, then dropped to the ground and disappeared into the two-foot space beneath the barracks.

Once under cover, he lay on his back, pulling on a pair of overalls which he had thoughtfully secreted that afternoon. Then he began his hazardous progress toward the other end of the building. It required an interminable time, so it seemed to Barry, before he reached the spot where the real operations would begin. Not ten feet away stood the guard, his feet stirring the gravel as he shifted weight from one to the other. The slightest sound would mean death to the prowling Yankee.

The latter waited until the sentry started on one of his tours about the structure, then pressed his hands against the floor boards of the admiral's office. It was as he had hoped; his knowledge of the manner in which these shacks were constructed was correct. Inch by inch the panel of three boards, cleated together, went up. The

rug which covered the room caused a slight resistance, but fortunately no furniture stood over the spot. When the sentry returned to his post, Barry had already squeezed through the opening, eased the panel back into place, and lay, with straining ears, on the floor beside the admiral's desk!

In the darkness Barry ran his hands over the desk, gingerly tried the drawers. Only one of them, the upper right hand, was locked. By the play of the thing, the intruder could tell that slipping the catch would not be difficult and this he accomplished readily with his penknife. The slight sound made in the operation caused him to hold his breath for a full minute. But the guard gave no sign and presently Barry ventured to explore the drawer's contents with his fingers.

He could feel several neat stacks of documents and two folders of heavy paper. These he withdrew and lay quiet until the next trip of the sentry. Then Barry crawled under the desk and, carefully hooding his electric torch, examined his loot.

The first envelope contained nothing more than flight logs of the ships on their journey from Lake Constance. But one glance at the contents of the second told Barry that he had found what he was after.

There it was, neatly blocked out in infinite detail. Squadrons and personnel, numbers of the Zeppelins, routes, time of starting, objectives assigned to each ship, commanders, quantities of H. E. With horror he read references to gas bombs—the "frightfulness" of which hints had been dropped. The fiends!

Now he found, to his intense satisfaction, the date of the raid—eight days hence.

Lying flat on his stomach, light making a single round spot which was invisible outside the cavernous space beneath the desk, Barry worked feverishly—transcribing to sheets of paper the salient points in the program. He dared not take the originals and he skipped much of the detail, such as personnel. But he noted carefully the routes and objectives, the time and proposed altitudes. So that the third tramp of the sentry about the barracks found the Yankee once more beneath the structure, the precious papers, wrapped in a bit of doped fabric, snugly tucked away in his breast pocket.

Once clear of the post, Barry made his way to a well which stood beside a barn on the Courtrai road, shoved the packet which also contained the order form he had stolen, under the stone curb and made his way jauntily back toward Ghent.

If the party was still in progress, he would sit in once more. If not, he would sneak off to bed. His blood still raced with the thrill of what he had done. But there remained the hazardous problem of getting away with his information without exciting suspicion. It was best, he thought, not to carry the incriminating documents about with him until he knew just how he was going to manage his get-away.

THE revel at the Touraine was just breaking up when Barry reached the place, and the participants were too befuddled to know or care that one of their number had been missing for close to three hours.

Barry knew that he lacked one bit of information—a clew which would lead to the German organization in London, the crowd which was coöperating with Lentz. There were eight days before the raid would take place. With luck—

Yet, in the back of his mind was a

feeling of apprehension. It centered around the Fischer episode; mostly it concerned the driver of the tender and how much he knew. Still, thirty-six hours had passed and nothing had happened. Hell! He would risk another day at least and if he made no progress, leave at once.

Accordingly, after a breakfast at which the rounders of the night before were bleary-eyed and taciturn, the American slipped away and presented himself at the office of Admiral Lentz.

"I came," said Barry, "because I have been a prisoner in England and thought you might like to question me."

"Indeed!" returned the Admiral, who had seemed surprised at a lieutenant's coming to see him thus informally, now beamed with interest.

At once the admiral plunged into the subject of conditions in England and his visitor fed him plenty, dwelling on the terrific collapse of morale under German air raids and ending with, "But I am told that the attack which you are preparing will cause all previous ones to fade into insignificance."

"Without the slightest doubt," boasted the other, pompously. "Would you care to see my ships, *Herr Leutnant?*"

"Nothing would delight me more," declared Barry, truthfully. And presently he was moving from hangar to hangar, scanning the silver monsters and listening to the admiral's glowing prophecies of London's doom. So good a listener he proved that he found himself invited to lunch as the admiral's guest.

This was all well enough, but it brought Barry no closer to what he sought although he tried valiantly to swing the conversation into channels which might afford some inkling that would prove useful. Well, he would dig out that night or early next morning.

Stealing a plane was out of the question; that would warn off the raiders. Barry's game was to forge an order posting himself to some squadron, if possible a night bombing outfit, go out on a tour of duty and simply fade out of the sketch. He would be reported missing and his return to England would scarcely be guessed until after the big show came off. After dark tonight he would retrieve his papers.

Matters were going altogether too smoothly; it bothered him. They were progressing as he had hoped they would, to be sure, but it seemed too good to be true. He might have spared himself worry on that score, however, as subsequent events revealed.

CHAPTER VI.

CONFUSION IN THE NIGHT.

DARKNESS came early that night; lowering clouds and a gusty wind presaged rain.

Relying on information he had picked up, Barry determined to advise the colonel that he could wait no longer for his friend to appear and ask for transportation to Courtrai in the morning. Then he would secure his packet from its hiding place and be ready for an early start.

It was near ten o'clock when Barry left for the wing commander's office adjoining the orderly room. The path leading to the door led under the windows of the colonel's room and these were open, but covered by drawn shades which stirred in the erratic breeze.

As the American approached, walking slowly, busy with his thoughts, the telephone in the commander's office

rang shrilly and Barry heard the guttural tones of the colonel as he answered the summons. He kept evenly on his way, however, only to stop short and stiffen as the speaker, his voice suddenly rising with excitement, bellowed, "von Wehlau! Yes— *Mein Gott!* You could not get me? Instantly! I shall be—ah—he is? Yes, instantly!"

Barry froze inside. What in hell was it all about? Detection! It could be nothing else. He must get his papers and escape!

But even as he stood there, momentarily inactive, stunned by what he had overheard, the door of the orderly room flew open and the adjutant plumped smack into the hesitating Yankee!

Instinctively Barry drew back, prepared to fight. But the officer said, "Ah, it's you, *Leutnant*. How fortunate. The colonel wishes to see you."

Partly from a desire to learn the worst and partly to gain time to think, the American permitted himself to be shepherded into the colonel's room where he saluted and stood to attention, keeping himself alert for a dash if it should become necessary. Beside the two officers the only occupant of the two rooms was a sleepy clerk in the adjutant's office. With astonishment, Barry noted that the colonel was smiling and the latter's voice, when he spoke, was pleasant and even.

"Leutnant von Wehlau," he began, "I have some good news for you."

With an effort, Barry prevented his jaw from dropping. "Yes, sir," he managed.

"Your friend, Captain von Wettberg, will arrive this evening," said the colonel, surprisingly.

Barry's throat went dry. What sort of a game was this, anyhow? To the best of his knowledge, there was no such person. And here was this German colonel declaring that von Wettberg was about to arrive!

Once more the Yankee said, "Yes, sir."

The colonel glanced at the adjutant who stood between Barry and the orderly room door, and again addressed the spy. "What sort of a chap is the captain? Shall we like him, do you think?"

"He is a most likable fellow," sparred Barry.

"That is good; yes, that is good," the colonel said, with something like a chuckle. "Ah, perhaps this is he."

THE sound of a rapidly driven motor, the screech of brakes. The outer door opened, boots tramped across the floor and in the doorway appeared two men. Barry started as he recognized the foremost—Colonel Tauscher. But at sight of the other, the American almost collapsed.

There, with his head swathed in a great bandage, stood Captain Fischer!

Instantly the captain spoke, eyes flashing hatred at the bewildered American. "Pig of a murdering Yankee! I knew from the start that you were an enemy spy! It was not necessary that we should learn, as we have, that Leutnant von Wehlau is still safe in Donnington Hall! But for the patrol's finding blood on the pavement and investigating within, you would have succeeded in—"

He got no farther. Barry's temporary discomfiture had been followed instantly by a swift grasp of the situation. He was caught! The game was up! Every one of the Germans had his hand on his gun; when the captain's outburst should cease, he would be placed under arrest.

With the quickness of a cat and mad-

ness of a bull, the American rushed. Taken by surprise, Colonel Tauscher instinctively jumped aside and Captain Fischer, words still in the process of framing, went down like a ten-pin as Barry, reaching for his gun, tore through the orderly room and into the night.

Behind him the crash of exploding pistols; a bullet pinged past his ear. Desperately, the Yank sprinted for the open road.

But the shooting had aroused the camp. A sentry's rifle spoke and there was the thud of booted feet, converging on the orderly room from which the little knot of outwitted officers, followed by the sleepy private, tumbled, their weapons spitting red fire in the direction of the fleeing figure.

A rifle crashed almost in Barry's face and a hot breath fanned his cheek. It was the gate sentry. *Crack!* The man crumpled and the fugitive leaped over the writhing body and gained the street.

No thought of papers now, only a frantic determination to escape with what knowledge he carried in his head. Down the road he raced, urged on by the pandemonium emanating from the field, now augmented by the staccato of motor cycle engines. Hell! They would have him in a minute.

He swerved off the highway, fell headlong as he stumbled over a ditch. Recovering his feet, he tore through what seemed to be a field of sugar beets. The earth was soft and it was heavy going, but Barry struggled on until he had put some fifty yards between him and the road. Then he flung himself face down, panting, upon the ground.

Wild thoughts raced through Barry's brain as he lay there recovering his breath after his frantic dash for freedom. In an instant he had been plunged from comparative safety into the deadliest peril.

Fischer! That police patrol must have returned immediately after the American's flight from the house in the Rue Mordant; otherwise the captain would have been strangled. By a fluke they had found the bloodstains where Fischer had fallen in the alley.

Fischer's delay in taking up his trail, Barry rightly guessed, must have been due to a long period of unconsciousness caused by concussion. That would explain it. Whatever the explanation might be, a certain Captain Vincent, R. F. C., was in one hell of a fix.

He roused himself from these chaotic reflections. It would not do for him to remain where he was. They would scour that field and the entire surrounding territory directly. Already motor cycles were tearing along the road and bellowed orders from the drome indicated the hasty formation of patrols. Thank Heaven the night was dark.

SPRINGING to his feet, considerably refreshed by his brief respite, Barry set out over the soft ground on a steady lope, taking a diagonal course which ought to emerge upon a crossroad which he had observed earlier. He reached the road ditch just as the beet field he had quitted was flooded by the white glare of a searchlight, mounted on the roof of a hangar.

Again and again the powerful rays swept the beet field. Then, satisfied that the fugitive was not there, the operators turned the light elsewhere. Crawling to the roadway, the American tore blindly along, flinging occasional glances over his shoulder to make sure that no motor had turned into the road he traveled. Distance

was what he wanted—distance between himself and that camp.

A dark huddle of buildings loomed suddenly on his right; simultaneously the lights of a motor swung in from the Courtrai road, far behind, and sped toward him. With leaping heart Barry plunged toward the group of structures which he saw to be a farm. There was the usual court and two or three outbuildings. He prayed that there were no dogs.

The motor car was upon him and just as he ducked into the shelter of what turned out to be a granary, the vehicle slewed to a sudden stop. Shouted orders told the fugitive that three men had been detailed to search the farm. The rest went on; doubtless they would be set down farther along.

The door through which Barry had squeezed had been partly open. He dared not close it, but, since it was on the side of the building away from the road, he did risk the momentary use of his flash light. Swiftly he took in the details of his refuge and, as the tramp of booted feet, the murmur of voices drew rapidly near, the desperate spy burrowed deep into a great bin of oats. There he lay quiet and half suffocated, but ready to leap up and fight if he should be discovered.

The clatter of hobnails on the wooden floor, the click of flash light switches, the thud of rifle butts as the lights revealed no menace. A voice said, "He wouldn't be fool enough to come to a place like this."

There was a murmur of assent. Somebody said, "Let's have a smoke."

A man sat down on the edge of the bin in which Barry cowered, threw the rays of his torch upon its contents. The light glowed redly through the grain that covered the Yankee's face. "Perhaps he's in there," one suggested.

"Huh," derided the man on the box. "Small chance. But if he is—" He rose to his feet and before Barry could grasp what was going forward, a bayonet stabbed through the oats, grazing his tunic as it plunged to the bottom of the bin!

The American's heart stood still. His blood seemed to freeze in his veins. One more thrust—the next—

But there was no next. Laughingly the man withdrew his weapon. "I think that scared him if he's in there," he said. Barry wanted to shout, "You're damned right it did!"

A few minutes of silence while the soldiers pulled at their pipes, then the bark of a motor cycle which suddenly ceased, in the adjacent road. Barry could hear the men scrambling to their feet as voices approached.

AT least two men, Barry reckoned, came into the place. Heels clicked and Barry caught the tones of Captain Fischer, the rumbling diction of the adjutant. The latter demanded, "Have you men searched the farm?"

"Not yet, sir," foolishly admitted one of the trio. "We have but just arrived, sir."

"Then turn out and do so at once. House, sheds, every nook and corner. Thoroughly, you understand."

"Yes, sir." A thumping of feet as the three went out.

"Lazy pigs!" exclaimed the adjutant. "Shall we smoke, *Herr Kapitan?*"

The seat on the edge of the bin, so lately occupied by one of the "lazy pigs," was usurped by Captain Fischer.

The smothering fugitive, throat full of dust, groaned inwardly. He would *have* to cough in a minute; he'd never be able to stall it off indefinitely! But

the words of the two officers claimed his attention so that for the moment, he forgot his distress.

The adjutant said, "He'll never escape; we shall have him within two hours."

"I would not gamble on it," declared Captain Fischer. "My own encounter proved that he is no fool. But he must be caught. He has doubtless learned all about the coming raid. The cheek of him, calling on the admiral. The old boy will feel a fool!"

"Showed him the whole works, I understand," said the adjutant.

"It's a wonder he didn't give him Bessara's name and address! Perhaps he did."

Barry grew rigid with excitement. Bessara! Could that be the name of the London agent? Gosh, it was!

"Bessara is smooth as the devil, I am told," said the adjutant. "Your pal, Kramer, told me something about him and his olives. How does he work it? I've forgotten, exactly."

"He is an olive merchant. Spanish, in regular standing. Our instructions are forwarded from the Madrid embassy by the olive route. Whole olives, not stuffed, you know. The British might examine stuffed ones more carefully. But with a mess of olives going through and only perhaps one out of a thousand made of *papier-maché*, and a perfect imitation at that—hah!"

Barry drew in his breath sharply, heedless of the fact that it almost strangled him. Slick? Well, he'd say it was slick. Bessara, olives. It would be child's play to round up that baby when he got to London.

Yes—when he did! *If* he did, was better.

And even as the thought flitted through his mind, disaster came.

There was a cry of consternation. Captain Fischer, teetering precariously on the edge of the bin, suddenly lost his balance and now, without warning, he toppled backward. His right hand, flung downward to break his fall, plunged through the light covering of grain, brought up against Barry's chest. After it tumbled the body of the captain who bellowed with alarm and struggled as if he had fallen into a nest of cobras.

For that matter, he might as well have done so. Because without a second's hesitation, even before the German stopped falling, Barry had fired!

What happened during the next few seconds, the Yankee never could recall clearly. A fierce struggle in a whirl of choking dust, another shot from his pistol.

The captain, fighting to draw his own weapon, suddenly collapsed; for Barry, struggling to gain his feet, heaved the body of his enemy high just as the adjutant, losing his head utterly, blazed away wildly at the American only to have his bullets find a mark in the body of his luckless companion.

WITH strength born of a desperation, Barry gained his feet. He lurched forward over the edge of the bin, still clutching the body of the captain; and this, with a terrific effort, he hurled against the adjutant.

Momentarily disconcerted, the other gave way and Barry, seizing the opening, pumped two bullets into the German just as the latter once more brought his gun into action. The bullet ripped through Barry's tunic, spatted viciously into the wood of the grain chest. With an involuntary shout of triumph, the American sprang from the bin and leaped for the door.

In the turmoil, he had entirely forgotten the three soldiers, but now they

came a running, bunched in their excited efforts to reach the scene of the shooting. Barry, realizing in a flash that he would have no chance in a straightaway flight from those rifles, stopped in his tracks.

Seizing the body of his latest victim, he swung it about just as the first of the trio gained the door with his two companions hard upon his heels. The rifle of the leading man was at the ready and as the American lunged forward, the adjutant's corpse was impaled on the menacing bayonet.

The weight of this and Barry's wild onrush hurled the man back upon his fellows. In the resultant confusion, the Yankee emptied his gun at close range, tore past the bewildered soldiers and sprinted for the road. Two wild shots whizzed past his head as he bolted to the motor cycle in which the officers had arrived; three more bullets missed him as he kicked the machine into life. Then, with a roar, he was gone—speeding at seventy miles an hour over an unknown road, toward an unknown destination and with death lurking on every side!

CHAPTER VII.

FLIGHT.

COURSING thus through the night, exhaust roaring, Barry had the feeling of an actor performing on a stage for an armed and hostile audience. All the world, it seemed to him, must hear the noise of his engine—must see his headlight racing through the murk. He half expected to see men, motors, companies of soldiers, converge upon him from every point of the compass while bombers and ground-strafing planes peppered him from above. But he managed to pull himself together and to consider his situation intelligently.

He must get a plane, that was all. But there was a fat chance of pulling anything like that off around St. Denis Westrum. Unless he should be apprehended, however, he could be a long way from there before daylight. If only he knew where this road would take him!

Backward glances revealed lights flashing here and there like will-o'-the-wisps, while straight ahead he could detect a ghostlike glow which indicated potential trouble. In his favor, of course, was the fact that reports of his escape which might have been broadcast, would contain the information that the fugitive was on foot.

Nevertheless, Barry wished to see nothing that looked or talked or acted like a German, for a long time to come.

Thrice he flashed by cars going in the opposite direction. He did not worry about those behind; he had the speed. But when he had run past two sentries and had been automatically fired upon for refusing to stop on command, he began to wonder how much longer he could successfully run the gantlet. The answer to that came with disconcerting swiftness as the Yankee approached the next crossroad, just outside a small town.

The field telephone must have been busy because, as Barry prepared to give his motor cycle full speed as he neared the sentry post, a stout barrier on which red lights blossomed threateningly, caused him to jam on his brakes and come to a skidding stop as the only alternative to crashing against the stout tree trunk which was the pivoted barricade. A coal-scuttled soldier, with rifle raised, demanded, "Your pass, please."

"How dare you stop me?" stormed

the Yankee, in tones calculated to wither any common Jerry soldier.

"My orders, sir," said the other, stolidly.

The only pass Barry possessed was the one issued to Leutnant von Wehlau. That, he reflected, would be a fine thing to spring at this time and place. Nevertheless, he chanced a daring play.

"Here!" he snarled, flipping the document under the guard's nose. "Here is my pass! Now are you satisfied?" He counted on a perfunctory glance on the part of the sentry as frequently occurred. But, to his disgust, the man extended his hand, held the paper in the rays of the headlights, to examine it intelligently.

That was his undoing. As he bent over to read the name, Barry's right fist cracked smartly against the Teuton jaw, connected with a sound like snapping an apple with one's fingernail, only far louder. It was a good blow and with a groan, the man sagged to the roadway.

Hurriedly, Barry dragged him aside, recovered his useless pass and swung the barrier about. But even as he gained his machine, a rakish staff car slid in from the rear and, before the Yankee could get under way, passed him and halted diagonally across the road. Several officers and men spilled instantly from the open tonneau with drawn pistols.

Instantly he fired at the figures running toward him—six rapid shots—and, as two of the newcomers dropped in their tracks, the luckless Barry fled once more into the fields.

That is, he tried to do so. But, as he sprang across the inevitable ditch, his foot caught on a hummock and heavily, without a chance to break his fall, the young man plunged forward on his face. Before he could begin to raise himself, he was flattened out by the onslaught of three enraged and weighty Germans!

A Prussian voice growled, "So, von Wehlau! It is you! Ha! The pleasure is great—as you will soon see!"

CHAPTER VIII.

SENTENCED.

LOCKED in an eight-foot cell in a concrete warehouse which had been transformed into a discouragingly efficient jail, with two armed guards watching his every movement, Barry Vincent gathered small comfort from the arrival of dawn. Nor was his state of mind improved by the arrival, at nine o'clock, of Colonel Tauscher, Admiral Lentz, and the commandant of the St. Denis air station.

These gentlemen and the numerous aides who accompanied them viewed the prisoner and gave violent expression to their personal opinions of him and Yankee pigs in general. They looked upon him, Barry thought, much as they would have observed a garden slug which they were about to step on shortly—which was a pretty accurate parallel.

Vigorously the higher officers tried to induce the American to talk; employed every trick known to the Imperial Intelligence and to Prussian ingenuity. Realizing that their tactics were and would continue to be fruitless, they set about the agreeable task of convening a court-martial.

A farce, of course. Barry smiled grimly as certain routine forms were applied to the proceedings. They might just as well take him outside and plug him at once. Still, his captors would derive a kick from a prolonga-

tion of the agony, and it mattered nothing to the victim. He had done what he could. He had no hope. It was rotten to be rubbed out like this, but he could go retaining his self-respect.

What lay heavy on his soul was the thought of those coming raids—the slaughter of innocent women and children; the wrecking, to no real purpose, of a fair city. More, the continued sinister activities of the spy, Bessara, and his minions galled him. But here he was, and here he would remain; to-morrow at this time he would be through. He could not see any way out. He was watched constantly, and his custodians took no chances. It was curtains with a vengeance!

It was one o'clock when the summons came, and, arms pinioned, the prisoner was led into the room where the officers of the court-martial were assembled.

The proceeding was perfunctory, as Barry had anticipated. He admitted the truth of the allegations, offered no defense. He was in no mood for empty gestures. Thus, after a moment's conference, the court returned a verdict of "Guilty of the crime of espionage." Followed immediately the sentence, which ended "....and the sentence of this court-martial is that the prisoner shall be confined under close guard until dawn to-morrow, when he shall be put to death by shooting."

BARRY VINCENT rose from the wooden bench on which he had been sitting and took a few turns about his narrow cell. As he resumed his seat, he glanced at his watch, stared almost unbelievingly at the dial. Half past twelve! And only a few minutes ago it was ten o'clock! Already twelve hours had flown since that bit of formality which would end in the snuffing out of his life in a little over four hours more!

Four hours! Barry shuddered in spite of himself. Four hours! A few short steps, urged on by a couple of guards. A wall. Some directions, probably, as to where he should stand, or something of the sort. Ugh! The crash of rifles—the last sound he would hear! After that—well, *he* need not worry; his job would have ended—vainly, too.

Dully he felt himself slipping into a doze.

The eerie wail of a siren brought the American back to alert consciousness. Air raid warning. The fat sentry was standing, rigid, head cocked in listening attitude. Barry, too, strained his ears.

They had not long to wait. The rhythmic *thud! thud!* of anti-aircraft batteries away to the south—the dull boom of exploding bombs. Outside, on the tarmac, a pandemonium of running feet, shouted orders. Then the thunder of warming motors, the *rat-tat-tat* of Spandaus being tested. These sounds of combat warmed the American's heart. It was good to pass out to such an accompaniment. Mentally he cheered the oncoming raiders.

Now they were coming nearer; evidently the St. Denis drome had been one of their objectives, perhaps the main one. The near-by batteries burst into furious activity. *Boom! Who-o-oh! Crack!* Up went the shells. Barry walked excitedly about in his confined space. If only he could be where he could at least see the show! The guard stood, peering along the corridor, his big, flabby face white with fear.

Swish—bang! The ground trembled with the detonation of a three hundred

pounder. Another. Tons of H. E. hurtled from the skies as the raiders located their principal target.

Then, of a sudden, the downward howl of a falling bomb—a rocking blast! The cell, it seemed to Barry, was looping the loop. There was a sound of splintering wood, of thudding masonry. The Yankee flung himself face down on the trembling floor and shielded his head with his arms. A blast of fresh air caused him to raise himself. Then, with leaping heart, he sprang to his feet.

The cell was flooded with pale moonlight where the outer walls had cracked and sagged apart, leaving a V-shaped aperture whose apex was not more than four feet from the floor. And, turning hurriedly about, Barry saw the motionless form of his keeper stretched outside the cell.

What a break! With the feeling of a condemned man who has been granted a last-minute respite, the Yankee sprang for the hole in the wall. As he gained the open, two more bombs fell simultaneously and the world was filled with flying débris as a section of the wooden hangars was blown to extinction.

Darting around the corner of his late quarters, Barry sped toward the far end of the line of hangars.

As he scurried along in the shadow of the building, his foot caught on something and he plunged face down in the grass. Ugh! He had fallen over a body, and the unforgetable smell of fresh blood told him that here was a victim of the raid. He started to go on, but an idea gripped him and he dropped beside the dead man, dragged the body out into the moonlight.

Barry shuddered. The victim was mangled horribly, the head a shapeless mass of pulp and the body torn and limp with broken bones. But this did not shock the American now. In it his alert mind saw his big chance. Hastily he felt for the dead man's identity disk, secured it, and in its place substituted that of Von Wehlau which he himself still wore.

He rummaged in the German's pockets and abstracted every vestige of paper, money, knife, watch and keys. These he tucked away in his own clothing. Then he dragged the corpse back to a point just outside the break in the concrete wall through which he had escaped. With one last look at the evidence he was leaving behind to reassure the Germans that the secret of the great *Strafe* was safe, Barry ran for the tarmac.

NOBODY paid the slightest attention to him as he bolted toward a Fokker pursuit plane that stood on the line apparently awaiting a pilot. Unchallenged, he sprang into the cockpit—bawled at a group of mechanics who were crouching under shelter from the raining bits of H. E. shell. One man reluctantly rose to his feet and trotted to the plane.

"Turn it over! Turn it over!" snapped the Yank.

And the man, one eye cocked at the blazing heavens, swung the prop. Two turns and she caught. Barry pulled the throttle full on. The Fokker streaked across the field, rose like a bird within eighty feet, and, while Barry Vincent in a frenzy of joy shouted defiance into the roar of the motor, mounted in a stiff climb for the ceiling.

At ten thousand feet he flattened out, looked about for some indication of the situation. The raiders had laid all of their eggs, and were fighting their way out. Thither Barry turned his plane.

The dim shapes of three Fokkers swept past him, streaking back in the direction of the drome he had quitted. Then two more. Hello! Had the defenders decided to lay off? Certainly it looked that way. Yes. There went the German "washout" signal, fired from a Very pistol. And, at almost the same instant, Barry found himself staring at the faint glow of instrument lights in the cockpit of a Camel. Out of the darkness other Camels took form, and presently the exultant Yankee was flying above and in the rear of a formation composed of three Handley-Page bombers and a score of fighting scouts—all headed for some point behind the Allied lines.

Thus it was that officers of the 947th Wing, R. F. C., were thrown into a state of wild curiosity when the successful raiders, landing in quick succession on the drome, found their number augmented by one of the latest Fokkers and an individual who appeared to be a Prussian officer.

He demanded that he be taken at once to the colonel; and the commanding officer, after a couple of murmured words on the part of the prisoner, immediately closeted himself with the supposed Boche, to the astonishment of the whole staff. Which astonishment was increased when, after a time, the old man himself drove off with his visitor without mentioning his destination.

LESS than six hours after the arrival of Barry Vincent on British soil, one Manuel Bessara, who styled himself an importer of olives, was locked up in Bow Street, while a group of intelligence officers scanned divers messages, inscribed minutely on onion-skin paper, which had been yielded up by a number of imitation green olives culled from a shipment arriving from Spain that day.

But if Barry blushed under the flattering expressions of congratulation which assailed his ears in that connection, he was entirely overwhelmed, some days later, when the newspapers published the following story:

GREATEST AIR VICTORY OF WAR

American in R. F. C. Thwarts Great Zeppelin Raid

Enemy airplanes crossed the East Coast yesterday evening and attacked certain points in the Midlands, inflicting slight damage. This is the first raid attempted on such a scale against the middle counties.

Our air forces, operating upon information secured by Colonel Barry Vincent, an American who has served two years with the corps, met and engaged the raiders as they were returning to their base. Thirty-eight enemy planes were shot down in flames, and at least four are known to have come down at sea, out of control. These are believed to have been lost.

On the same evening our planes, recruited from the airdromes in France and led personally by Colonel Vincent, thwarted a gigantic raid of Zeppelins which had been assembled near Ghent for the purpose of bombing London with high explosives and gas bombs simultaneously with the raid on the Midlands.

Several squadrons under Colonel Vincent attacked and demolished the camouflaged hangars of the Zeps, and the colonel, learning that two ships had already left, pursued and sent one of them down in flames and later forced the other to land near the Thames estuary, where it was captured intact and the crew made prisoners.

Colonel Vincent, it is officially announced, has been awarded the Distinguished Service Order, and the investiture will take place at Buckingham Palace in the near future.

THE END.

"Come! A kiss, little pagan!" they jeered

Cyrano

Riding to France's imperiled fortress of Mont St. Michel, Cyrano swaggers through a gay and gallant rôle in a mysterious drama of medieval intrigue and rebellion

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

Author of "Down the Coast of Barbary," "Loot Royal," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

CYRANO DE BERGERAC, fighter, drinker, poet, gayly ironic rogue, and former guardsman of King Louis XIII, kills a messenger in a tavern brawl. It is in the troublous days of 1642, just after the rebellion of the princes, when Cardinal Richelieu, prime minister, is trying to save France and his own power against intrigues of a dozen rivals, such as the king's favorite, Cinq-Mars.

Cyrano finds on the messenger a letter to M. d'Effiat, Cinq-Mars's cousin and the quite unclerical abbot of Mont St. Michel, France's great western fortress. The letter recommends the bearer as "useful to our cause." He also finds a packet sealed with Cardinal Richelieu's own mark.

The letter Cyrano takes to M. d'Effiat, who welcomes him. The package, to Père Carré, head of Richelieu's espionage system. Père Carré and Cyrano engage in a battle of wits,

This story began in the Argosy for November 16.

whose upshot is that Cyrano is given a star-shaped reliquary to wear, and a sealed document of authority to carry: and is ordered to do all in his power to make sure Mont St. Michel does not fall into the hands of an enemy of France.

M. d'Effiat in turn commissions Cyrano to repair to the castle of a reputed sorceress, Mlle. Marianne de Gisy, and take her, by craft or force, to Mont St. Michel, to discuss a certain land dispute—and for more personal reasons.

Cyrano, who has admired the red-gold hair of Mlle. de Gisy from afar, arrives at the Tour de Gisy with Effiat's lackey Mervaut in time to rout some marauding soldiers. He tells her, in his amazing fashion, how he had planned to take her to the Mont, and protect her there like a troubadour or knight; now he warns her not to go. But she determines to accompany him to Mont St. Michel and to adventure!

CHAPTER IV.

—IS ELSEWHERE.

EVENTS of considerable bearing on the distant Cyrano were transpiring in the south of France, in ancient Narbonne, whence the rabble army of France was driving the Spaniards back beyond the Pyrenees.

Armand Jean du Plessis, Cardinal and Duke de Richelieu, minister and virtual ruler of France, was closeted with one of the secretaries of state, Chavigny.

"How much time have we, Chavigny?" asked Richelieu, weary of dictating letters. His sharp, ascetic features were wan and worn with suffering, and the gray hair fell lank and sweat-thick about his head. His right arm, covered with ulcers, was useless.

"His majesty will not arrive before an hour, *monseigneur.*"

"Good. Will you have the kindness to send M. de Mazarin to me?"

Chavigny gathered up his papers, bowed, and withdrew.

Richelieu lay in his great traveling-bed, whose scarlet curtains were drawn back for air. These curtains were embroidered with the cardinal's hat and arms, as though in mockery of the wasted figure on the pillows inside. Since the minister at this time dreaded assassination, and with good reason, the doors were guarded and the ante-chambers were filled with his adherents and guards.

Dying, Richelieu might be; but to the dismay of those who thought him moribund, his will was unshaken. As though to deny approaching dissolution, never had his genius been so savagely alert to the peril surrounding him. He himself, and all France, were approaching a crisis with each fleeting moment; and he was preparing to meet it undismayed.

Louis XIII had left the court in Tarascon and had come to Narbonne, himself carried in a litter. The king, also dying by slow degrees, had no suspicion of the intrigues, the gathering treachery, the rising menace threatening to overwhelm minister, king and country. Richelieu kept grim silence about these things; he must first have conclusive evidence before he attempted to bring the greatest nobles in France to scaffold and exile.

At this period Richelieu was enjoying one of those brief respites from physical torture which enabled him to keep in his own hands all the threads of statecraft. From Narbonne he ruled France, conducted the war with Spain,

menaced all Europe, and kept his finger on the pulse of the court in Tarascon, where his bitterest enemies were centered.

The door opened. The implacable gaze of Richelieu fell upon the sleekly handsome figure of the Italian secretary who alone possessed his entire confidence, and the cold eyes warmed a little.

Four years previously, at the age of thirty-seven, Giulio Mazarini had become a naturalized Frenchman. With this act he opened his very simple campaign—to make himself so indispensable that, when Richelieu died, Mazarin must take his place. He possessed a perfect poise, a shrewdness which nothing could disturb, an ambition which nothing could satisfy, and an ability which none could equal. Richelieu trusted him.

Bowing profoundly, Cardinal Mazarin came forward and arranged his papers on the table beside the great bed.

"The Paris courier has arrived?" asked Richelieu.

"Yes, your eminence," lisped Mazarin. He had never rid himself of the soft Italian accent which infuriated so many people. Now, settling himself at the table, he took up the papers and began to go through the reports.

"OF the utmost importance, *monseigneur;* **our London** agent states that two ships have been secretly outfitted at Falmouth and are on the point of sailing. It is supposedly a private enterprise for the New World, backed by certain Puritan leaders, among them a M. Cromwell. That is all.".

A savage gleam lighted the cold gaze of Richelieu.

"Ah, these Puritans!" he murmured with distaste. "I knew it, I knew it. You comprehend, M. Mazarin? Two ships—more than enough to seize the fortress! Cinq-Mars has arranged with Montgommery, the Huguenot chief. A private enterprise can always be disclaimed by London. But go on."

Mazarin proceeded with the reports already summarized in barest details by Père Carré—reports which covered the world and touched on all the politics of Europe. When he had finished, he waited in silence, caressing the goatee which he wore in imitation of his master.

"As you foretold," said Richelieu, "this is why Effiat went to Paris. He will go to Mont St. Michel—the Montgommery is already at its gates with his Huguenots—and with the two English ships—hm! Yes, we did well to warn Père Carré two days since."

"But, your eminence, we merely told him to obtain a report on the Mont. In the light of this present information—"

"Which comes from the hand of Père Carré himself," broke in Richelieu. "Trust our good father superior! Now let Effiat hang himself with his cousin's rope!"

"He is a man who stops at nothing, and he is powerful," persisted Mazarin gently. "The garrison of Mont St. Michel and of the sister island, Tombelaine, are commanded by M. de Coalin, a distant relative of the Effiats. The abbot, Effiat, is a cousin of Cinq-Mars; the garrison is composed of serfs from the mainland fiefs of the abbey; either or both might well betray the place. But the monks—ah, that is another thing entirely!"

"So!" murmured Richelieu thoughtfully. "I see! The royal commandant Coalin is the strategical point, eh? Yet it is a delicate matter. I would not

give any cause to think that we suspect anything."

"Oh, *monseigneur,* it is very simple!" lisped Mazarin. "There is the position in the king's household which M. de Chavigny has solicited for his cousin. We will contrive to have M. de Cinq-Mars solicit it for his relative M. de Coalin this very day. The letters of recall will be sent Coalin by special courier, post-haste, to-night. Meantime, I can get a courier off for Paris within an hour, bearing the appointment of commandant in favor of M. le Marquis de Salignan who is at his estates near Caen. The chancellor will seal the appointment and send it on at once to Marquis de Salignan with imperative orders to assume the post as swiftly as he can reach the Mont. Thus, by the time M. d'Effiat reaches his abbey, he will find an unpleasant surprise awaiting him. We should, of course, give Salignan full powers and a free hand to act."

"Excellent!" approved Richelieu, leaning back. "Upon my word, *monsieur,* you have conceived an admirable solution! Handle it as you suggest. Salignan is an excellent man."

MAZARIN made a note or two, smirking to himself. He had put a spoke in the wheel of Chavigny, who was his only possible rival for power, and had at the same time placed a strong and loyal man in command of Mont St. Michel. Now he looked up.

"*Monseigneur,* I have myself gained interesting news to-day. Cinq-Mars is in communication with the king's brother, the Duc d'Orleans; he not only anticipates your death, which may God forfend, but he would like to hasten it."

"Yes," said Richelieu dryly. "M. le Grand Equerry is ambitious; but there is no room in France for ambitious men—at present."

Mazarin discreetly lowered his eyes. "We know that Cinq-Mars and M. de Thou are behind this activity," he went on. "We know they are in touch with Madrid. We know they, and the princes, would not hesitate to make peace with Spain, to intrigue with the Huguenots, and to overthrow your eminence at any cost to France. Unhappily, we lack proof."

"Exactly; we lack proof," said Richelieu with asperity.

"His majesty may not be a wise king," murmured Mazarin, "but he has the greatest abhorrence for traitors."

"Ah!" Richelieu was watching his secretary intently. "You know something?"

"I hope to know something very soon, and have already learned a little," returned Mazarin with his usual air of deference, as though he were uttering something quite commonplace. "Perhaps your eminence already knows that the Spanish Cortes has approved a secret treaty which has been brought from Madrid and is now in possession of Cinq-Mars?"

"What?" Richelieu turned on his pillows, his eyes widening. "A secret treaty with our enemies?"

"Yes. Madrid will not trust Cinq-Mars's agents, but demands that the document be signed by Gaston of Orleans, by the Duc de Bouillon, and by—her majesty the queen."

A flash of terrible joy crossed the features of Richelieu at thus discovering how his bitterest enemies were delivered into his hand, and he lifted his eyes, as though in mute thanks to Heaven. Then, looking again at Mazarin, a thin smile touched his lips which had not smiled for a year past.

"M. de Mazarin, we must secure this document—after it has been duly signed. You do not know its contents, of course?"

"Only in brief summary, your eminence." And Mazarin, with secret triumph, passed a slip of paper to the astounded figure on the bed. Richelieu looked it over, then let it fall, incredulous.

"IT is past belief!" he murmured. "Well, *monsieur,* you must now lay aside every other task and devote yourself to obtaining this treaty—after it has been signed, remember."

Mazarin started slightly. "Is it worth the risk to let it be signed, *monseigneur?*" he inquired. "If by any chance it eludes us, if it is smuggled out of France—"

"If it eludes us or is destroyed, M. de Mazarin," said Richelieu, "no one would be sorrier than you, I assure you."

Mazarin turned pale. "And the means?"

"I leave to you," said Richelieu, sinking back and relaxing. "So! French territory is to be occupied by Spanish troops, and Sedan handed over to them; a Huguenot uprising, with all our blood and treasure which was spent in crushing them gone to waste; the rebellious princes back in power. France disrupted, Gaston of Orleans appointed regent in event of the king's death! All these things can be averted, M. de Mazarin, by diligence on your part. Do not fail, I warn you most solemnly!"

"I shall not fail, *monseigneur,*" said Mazarin, but in his voice there was more despair than hope. "If we but knew when this document would be signed, who would carry it—"

A knock sounded at the door, which opened to disclose the austere features of the secretary, Chavigny.

"Your pardon, *monseigneur*—Père Syrmond asks for immediate speech with you."

Richelieu made a gesture of assent. The king's confessor was more important than all the gentlemen of the court put together.

Into the room came a black-robed figure of dignified, rather kindly features, and very deep-set eyes. The Jesuit saluted Richelieu with great respect.

"*Monseigneur,*" he said, with a troubled air, "my only excuse for disturbing you at this hour is that I have certain information of the most urgent nature, which should come to your ears without delay."

"To you, my father," said Richelieu with his most urbane air, "my doors are always open. If you desire that we be left alone—"

"No, no, let Cardinal Mazarin remain," said the Jesuit. "As your eminence is aware, there has been in the past a certain amount of most regrettable friction in certain departments of the government—let us say, as between church and state. Unhappily, the church herself is not always at unity, thanks to her zeal in the propagation of the faith."

At this, M. de Mazarin smiled discreetly down his nose. More than once, in matters of political policy, had Richelieu been close to open breaks, not only with the Jesuits, but with the Vatican itself. And it was not Richelieu who had capitulated.

"Friction should ever be removed if possible," said Richelieu suavely. He knew that the Company of Jesus had cast longing eyes upon New France, where the Recollet fathers were developing astonishing strength and results.

"My present errand," went on Père

Syrmond, "is of strictly private nature —with the minister, not with the cardinal."

"The minister is entirely at your service, my friend and father," returned Richelieu.

"The information I have for you comes from authentic sources, but I cannot quote them," said the deep-eyed Jesuit. "This information concerns three gentlemen. M. le Duc d'Orleans is at Moulins, awaiting news of certain events. M. de Cinq-Mars, the Grand Equerry, is at Tarascon. M. le Duc de Bouillon, the third gentleman, is in his city of Sedan."

Richelieu, his eyes very bright, made a slight gesture.

"In fifteen days," pursued the impassive Jesuit, "a document of most interesting nature will be sent from Tarascon to Moulins. From Moulins I believe it will be sent to Sedan. I strongly recommend that you take measures to secure this document, *monseigneur.*"

"*Monsieur,* you are most kind," said Richelieu, a fierce and devout joy illumining his wasted features. "If I but knew who was to carry the document—"

"It will be carried," said Père Syrmond, "by one of Cinq-Mars's gentlemen, the Comte d'Aubijoux."

At this, Mazarin in turn raised his eyes in thankful relief.

"I do not know the nature of the document," went on the Jesuit, "but I have reason to believe that it is of great importance to the state, *monseigneur.*"

"AH! But I know its nature!" exclaimed Richelieu. "The document was brought from Madrid. It provides that the King of Spain shall provide twelve thousand infantry and five thousand horses; this army will be given possession of Sedan by the Duc de Bouillon, who with M. de Cinq-Mars will then lead it upon Paris. At the same time, M. de Thou and others will have acted here in the south, with the army."

At these words, the features of the Jesuit became pale as death.

"But this—this is treachery to France!" he said in a low voice, staring at Richelieu. "It not only means your overthrow, it means the overthrow of France! And the king's brother, Gaston of Orleans—"

"Will prove an excellent witness for the prosecution," said Richelieu acridly. "And there is one thing more, my dear father. You may not know that in the west of France lives the grandson of that Constable de Montgommery who killed Henri II while jousting?"

"Montgommery? Yes, an arch-heretic, a leader of the Huguenots, I believe. He is said to be a trifle mad."

"He is not mad," and Richelieu's lips curved thinly. "Let us suppose, my dear father, that ships were to come from England into the Bay of Cancale, and that this Montgommery were to meet them with a Huguenot army and were to be given possession of the fortress of Mont St. Michel?"

"Heaven forbid!" The Jesuit's pallor became more accentuated. It was evident that he had known little of the treaty's contents. "Spaniards on the south, Savoy on the east, French revolutionaries marching on Paris, and English in the West? I had not imagined such things—they are incredible!"

"Their success, at least, is incredible," said Richelieu firmly. "In fifteen days; and Aubijoux carries the document! You hear, Mazarin? My father, I owe you great thanks for the information you have just given me. By the way—a curious coincidence—I

was on the point of asking Chavigny to visit you. I believe there is some mention of friction in New France, or in regard to New France—some lack of coördination between the Recollet fathers there and the Company of Jesus?"

The eyes of Père Syrmond sharpened a trifle.

"*Monseigneur,*" he said humbly, "the way of those who carry the Gospel to heathen lands is not always a smooth path. It is true, the Company has envisaged great plans for work in the Canadian field, but to carry these plans out it must not be hampered by a divided responsibility."

"Have the goodness to confer with M. de Chavigny," said Richelieu. "I promise you, I shall indorse absolutely the position of the Company of Jesus in this respect. In fact, I am firmly of the opinion that they should be placed in charge of all the mission work in New France."

Joy darted across the face of the Jesuit. Next moment, Richelieu and Mazarin were alone. The Italian regarded his master with a reflective air.

"*MONSEIGNEUR,*" he ventured, "may I bring to your recollection what you have promised madame your niece, the Duchess d'Aiguillon? As you know, she had established the Recollet fathers in New France."

Richelieu's lips twisted grimly. "*Monsieur,*" he retorted, "the sole fact to be remembered is that the Company of Jesus has saved France, which is worth everything; therefore I can well afford to give them New France, which is worth nothing. Now, *monsieur,* put all other duties aside. When this treaty has been signed by her majesty and the others, bring it to me."

"It shall be brought, *monseigneur,*" said Mazarin, and there was no longer any hint of despair in his voice.

Again a knock at the door. The captain of the cardinal's guards entered, saluted and reported that his majesty was arriving.

A singular scene ensued. Louis XIII, his life flickering, was sustained by a cruel persistence to outlive the minister whom he feared, respected, envied and admired. His traveling bed or litter was carried into the room and set down beside that of the cardinal. Wasted and pale with his own illness, the king put back the curtains and held forth one hand to Richelieu, who turned on his pillows and touched his lips to the thin fingers.

"Sire," he murmured, "you overwhelm me with kindness! That you should thus visit me—"

"Is but your due," said Louis. There was almost affection in his thin, cruel, utterly selfish features. "Good news, my friend! Perpignan is under siege and will soon be entirely invested. My physician promises that I may visit the army next week, and then return to Tarascon. And you?"

"Apparently I am in God's hand, as ever," said Richelieu. He spoke to one and another of the king's gentlemen, who had entered and who now made their compliments to him. Then, as these retired and left them alone, he bent his coldly inflexible gaze on the king.

"Sire, may I ask a question?"

"My dear Richelieu, you may ask a thousand!"

"Then, if by the Divine Mercy I were enabled to lay in the hand of your majesty the signed and written proof that certain nobles had conspired, not against me, but against France—what would you do, sire?"

The king frowned. "More talk of plots and intrigue *Ventre St. Gris!* It wearies me. I tell you I don't like it!"

"Nor I, sire," returned Richelieu firmly. "Therefore I ask you, if I give you full proof that certain nobles have conspired to bring the enemies of France to the gates of Paris, and to place French cities in their grip—"

"Then, upon my word, they shall go to the scaffold, though they be the highest officers of the realm!" exclaimed Louis XIII sharply. "And I shall be the first to demand the full penalty, I promise you! But come, now; let us talk of more pleasant things."

So they fell to talk of more pleasant things, chiefly physicians and remedies.

CHAPTER V.

—ACQUIRES A WHIP.

IT was a very merry morning of late spring, and the road was not a long one to Palaiseau, whither Mervaut had been sent ahead to have the coach ready. Cyrano and Marianne de Gisy rode side by side, with much laughter and gay talk.

Cyrano uncased his lute and tuned it with snatches of song, as they sighted the silver thread of the Yvette in the valley. And in this pleasant intimacy Marianne turned to him and looked at the seven stars glistening on his cloak, and asked of them.

"Come, troubadour, what are these seven stars? It seems to me there is a meaning in them and in your words that is not wholly of astrology."

"True enough, daughter of the Sun!" exclaimed Cyrano, his eyes dancing. "My faith, they stand for many things! Are there not seven stars in the heavens? And what said the sage of Israel: 'Seek ye him that made the seven stars and the Hunter Orion'? But the seven stars of Cyrano—alas, lady, they're sad stars and beyond computation. Each star a virtue that is no more; or, if you like, each star one of the deadly sins! There's food for thought in the stars, as you should know; but why talk of these things on such a morning?"

And he swept a chord on his lute, his voice lifted in a gay lilt:

"Oh, the road is very good to see,
And full of hidden minstrelsy,
For all the little green trees make
music in the wind!
And as we ride to Palaiseau
With sun above and stream below,
There's laughter all the way we go,
and care is left behind!"

He checked himself suddenly, and blinked around; a thin, high, terrible sound had come piercing across the sunlight, so that the horses jerked up their heads, and the smile was stricken from the eyes of Marianne.

"What—what was that?" she murmured, staring about.

"That," and Cyrano hastily thrust away his lute into its case, "was a man dying—and not far away, indeed."

Now the road and countryside were deserted, but it was a winding road, full of turns and sheltered by copses of trees, and anything might lie around the next bend. Voices came in sudden outbursts as the two riders swung about a sharp turn and drew rein. Almost before knowing it, they found themselves in the midst of a surging throng.

An orchard wall bordered the road. About this wall were grouped a score of men, their jests and laughter rising cruel on the sunlight. Among them, at the foot of the wall, lay a dead man with a poniard-haft protruding from his back; his gay rags and tatters, his

swart skin, proclaimed him an Egyptian, as those of the wandering race were known. Bayed against the wall, dagger in hand, was a woman, the wife or daughter of the dead gypsy.

At sight of the strangers, the crowd eddied out. Most of them were rustics, but two, judging by their swords and garb and saddled horses near by, were travelers. Cyrano sat motionless, his eyes wide, all astare. This Egyptian woman, panting, flushed, clothes half torn from her body, dagger flashing no more brightly than her eyes, was a thing of savage and piercing beauty. Swart and eager as the dark sea under clouds, she menaced the pack of them and gave them pause.

ABRUPTLY the throng closed in upon her again, and Cyrano caught a half-gasp, half-groan from Marianne de Gisy. He put out a hand, checked her horse.

"Wait here, dear lady," he said, as he dismounted.

"Come, little pagan!" went up the shout. "Come, Egyptian! A kiss from those red—"

The dagger flashed, and with a cry, a man reeled backward and fell. A harsher note leaped into the curses and cries of the men around. Sticks struck at her, hands reached out. She stood immobile, as though spent by that desperate blow. For one flashing instant Cyrano, crowding forward, met her eyes and found them striking into his. Then, as a hand gripped at her clothes and tore them, her stiletto darted out. The hand dripped blood, the owner howled.

One of the two men with swords drove in at her from the side; a deadly stroke dealt by a brutal-faced ruffian. The woman screamed once as the steel went into her, then twisted about, trying to strike as she reeled against the wall.

A wilder, terror-stricken note suddenly shrilled up from the men around, for the silver hilt of Cyrano's poniard flashed in the sun and flashed again. The man with the sword pitched down upon his face, and Cyrano swung upon the others, his voice roaring at them.

"*Canaille;* To your kennels, dogs! Vile scum that you are! Cowards and murderers!"

He advanced upon them, transfigured by fury, in his whole aspect all the terrible savage blood-lust which had aforetime made him so dreaded a swordsman. They were, for an instant, appalled by his action, by his wild and terrible look. He seized a stick from the nearest peasant and swept at them; they broke in terror, deeming him some noble, swift to punish them. All, that is, save one.

The companion of the dead man threw up his sword, and with an oath bore in upon Cyrano. Laughing, Cyrano engaged the blade with the poniard in his left hand, and looked into the eyes of his furious opponent.

"Oh, fool that you are!" he cried. "Thrice fool, to draw steel upon Cyrano!"

And suddenly the sword was wrenched from the man's grip, to fly away and fall clattering. The stick in Cyrano's right hand lashed in a blow that stretched the swordsman senseless in the dust. The others had fled hastily from the scene. Turning to the Egyptian, Cyrano swung off his hat; it had remained on his head, although the lute was broken.

"Mademoiselle, or madame," he began, "if—if—"

His voice faltered. The woman was leaning against the wall, her eyes fastened upon him; blood was streaming

from where the sword had bitten her side, and a deathly pallor was in her swarthy face. Then Cyrano was aware of Marianne de Gisy passing him, running to the woman, catching her in strong arms. He flung himself to her aid, and they let the woman down gently, Marianne holding her head. She was dying, as Cyrano now perceived.

There was a moment of dread silence. The sunlight was hot, the dust-laden air was stilled. The two dead men lay with blood black upon the ground, the senseless man stirred not, the horses were cropping at the wayside grass. The Egyptian woman opened her eyes, looked from Cyrano to Marianne, and her gaze held on the latter's face; but this gaze was wild as the faint words that came from her lips.

"Folly, mad folly—I tell you, they know that we carry it! Here, take it quickly—keep it from him!"

HER hand lifted, her fingers tore at the string of a small leather scapulary about her neck—strange object to be worn by a woman of the Egyptians—and she thrust the thing into the hand of Marianne. Wonderingly, Marianne accepted it. Then the woman's hand flashed out, pointing to Cyrano, and a shrill laugh came to her lips.

"Ah, *gros-bec!*" she said, speaking in the argot of Paris, which Cyrano comprehended readily enough. To Marianne the words meant nothing. "Leave her, fool, leave her! Beware of him—he brought death—he carries death perched upon his shoulder."

"Beware of whom?" exclaimed Cyrano sharply. "Quick!"

"Of him—the cleft chin—the cleft chin!"

A shiver passed through the body of the woman. Her head fell back. Marianne let her rest gently on the ground, and looked up at Cyrano, perplexed.

"What was it she said? The poor creature."

"Nothing; warnings — warnings against some man," said Cyrano, and rising, gave Marianne his hand and brought her to her feet. "I did not understand it all. These Egyptians of Paris have no business wandering about the countryside."

"It is terrible," Marianne glanced around, moved a little away from the dead woman. "If we go on quickly?"

"No hurry," said Cyrano. "I sent that accursed Mervaut to fetch the coach; he'll bring it soon. I think I'll look at these two gentlemen."

He regarded the man whom he had poniarded, the murderer of the Egyptian woman. Yet this dead face did not correspond to her description. It was rather the face of a servant, of a lackey. Cyrano looked at the horses of the two men, and saw that they were very good animals indeed, of some value. He was about to approach the second man, when there was a shout, and with a whirl of dust their coach appeared, Mervaut riding before it.

"So, we start!" exclaimed Cyrano. "Dear lady, you will occupy the coach now?"

Marianne assented. "Yes. Where do we stop for the night?"

"At Versailles, and then to the western highway. I'll send you ahead and catch up in a few moments; I want a word with that rascal of a lackey."

With the coach had come a driver and a groom. The latter dismounted and, with Mervaut, was excitedly looking over the scene; Cyrano gave the coachman his orders, and then, taking the reins of his horse, watched the

coach depart. Marianne, he perceived, was glad to be gone from this place of death.

Almost at his feet, Cyrano perceived something in the dust—a whip, and a very handsome one, of leather braided with gold and silver wire. He picked it up; some one in the throng must have dropped it, but no peasant would bear such a thing as this.

The butt was a round disk of gold, in which was chiseled the initial "A." Cyrano inspected it curiously, then shrugged.

"It perhaps belongs to the rogue who drew sword on me," he reflected, and glanced around. Somewhat to his surprise, he saw that Mervaut and the groom were now kneeling beside that same unconscious man, attempting to revive him. Cyrano approached, and caught a look of scornful contempt from Mervaut which quite infuriated him.

"Come, come, sirrahs, are you robbing the dead?" Cyrano asked ironically.

"No, *monsieur,*" rejoined Mervaut. "We are succoring the injured."

The tone was insolent, and Cyrano, who did not love lackeys at all, turned slightly pale.

"This injured man is a friend of yours, Mervaut?" he demanded in a low voice. The lackey rose and met his eyes boldly enough.

"I think, *monsieur,* that he is a gentleman," was the response. "I have seen him in Paris."

CYRANO looked down at the face of the man, who was just opening his eyes. Then he started. Here was the face the Egyptian woman had described—a strong, wide face with a prominent and deeply cleft chin. What did her warning mean; could it have meant anything? Did she, in the very grip of death, have some prevision of things to be?

"You know this man's name, Mervaut?" he asked.

"I think he is the Sieur d'Avillon, *monsieur.*" The lackey was about to say more, when he turned, saw that the coach was gone, and swung upon Cyrano with hot anger in his eyes. "*Monsieur,* did you send the coach away?"

"What is it to you?" Cyrano was astonished by the man's boldness.

"My master has ordered me to watch over the safety of Mlle. de Gisy," said Mervaut, and scowled. "She is in my care, and—"

"You insolent dog!" said Cyrano, disdainfully, forgetting that the servant doubtless set great store by the estate of his master. "Do you want a whiplash over your shoulders?"

Mervaut gave him a sour and impudent grin.

"Come, come, M. le Marquis," he said. "You forget that a woman is a woman the world over! It is true that my master has certain pressing need of your services, but do not impose upon the trust he reposes in you. I've observed your looks and actions with *mademoiselle,* and I'm warning you—"

"Those who warn me are usually paid," said Cyrano.

His eyes gave the lackey no hint; the little whip lashed and Mervaut staggered back with a red weal springing across his face. The whip was heavy enough, meant for service; and for the second time, with astonishing effect, it lashed the face of Mervaut. Then Cyrano, in the midst of his contemptuous laugh, felt a hot breath on his neck—the groom was in the very act of driving a dagger into his side.

A sheer miracle of agility saved him

from the blow. He leaped sidewise, as a cat leaps, and caromed full into Sieur d'Avillon, who was just rising. Flung off balance, he stumbled, fell to hands and knees—then caught up the whip in his hand and threw himself to one side, and came upright.

"Kill!" rasped the voice of Mervaut. "Kill him!"

Cyrano glanced around. Mervaut had rapier out, the groom was plunging in with his long poniard, and Avillon, likewise gripping a dagger, was rising to attack him from the other side. For a breath Cyrano stood motionless—then, swift as light, he became a thing of flowing action. Disdaining to use steel against such adversaries, he trusted instead to the footwork which had helped make him the first swordsman in Paris.

The groom screamed and fell writhing in the dust as the whip smote him square across the eyes, blinding him. Avillon lunged in, but Cyrano's riding boot caught him under the chin, and for the second time he plunged down into the dust and lay quiet. At this instant a thin tongue of steel drove between Cyrano's side and arm, touching the skin yet not breaking it. Mervaut was upon him, recovering, leaning in for another and more deadly thrust.

At the instant of lunging, Mervaut stumbled across the writhing body of the blinded groom. The whip slashed across the wrist of his outflung arm, and the sword fell from his hand.

"Now for your punishment, rascal!" exclaimed Cyrano. "When you are next tempted to be insolent to a gentleman, remember this!"

A terrible cry burst from Mervaut as the bloody whip lashed him across the face. He attempted to rush in upon Cyrano, but the latter kept his distance, and time after time drove home his biting weapon. Streaming with blood, helpless, cursing, Mervaut flung his arms across his face and dashed away at a blind run.

He had not, however, begged for mercy, as Cyrano later recalled.

LEFT master of the field, Cyrano laughed and picked up his hat from where it had fallen. Then he paused, as something recurred to him.

"What 'certain pressing need' does M. d'Effiat have of my services, eh? Come, there's something to ponder! He doesn't need me to take the lady to the Mont—this rascal was ready enough to fling me in the ditch and conduct her himself. My faith, it looks as though there were far more in this affair than I suspected. Ah, here is our good Sieur d'Avillon! Good day to you, *monsieur,* and kindly leave your sword alone, since you don't know how to use it."

He beamed genially upon the dazed and bewildered Avillon, as the latter rose. Mervaut had disappeared; the groom was groaning and holding his eyes as he writhed. Cyrano was under no illusions as regarded Sieur d'Avillon, whom he knew all too well by reputation as one of the most dreaded Cardinalist agents.

Richelieu's man, in truth, did not inspire dread at this moment. Avillon was dusty, his mouth was bleeding, and he seemed anything but certain of his whereabouts. He stared at Cyrano.

"Ah!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I have seen you before!"

"Very likely, since I am no dwarf," and Cyrano chuckled. "The Marquis de Bergerac, very much at your service, Sieur d'Avillon. May I have the impudence to inquire why you were so

lustily engaged in murdering two Egyptians?"

"Devil take you!" said Avillon, blinking and coming somewhat to himself. He seemed jerked to life by mention of the luckless pair, and his eyes swept around and came to rest upon the body of the woman. "Ah! She is dead!"

"Thanks to you, murderer," said Cyrano.

Avillon turned and looked at him as though perceiving him for the first time.

"So, M. de Bergerac!" he said slowly, putting a hand to his bleeding mouth. "You've interfered with me, have you!"

"No; you've interfered with me," said Cyrano coolly, "and you'll answer to Père Carré for it when you see him."

Avillon started. His eyes widened.

"You?" he exclaimed. "You, rakehell, alley cat, *bretteur* of the gutters—you speak of him?"

Cyrano realized that Avillon knew him for what he was, had perhaps met or seen him in Paris. However, he was too full of contempt and disdain for the man. He shrugged, turned his back on Avillon, and went to the hapless groom.

"Rogue, take your master's horses and go home," he said, kicking Effiat's groom to his feet. "If you meet that scoundrel Mervaut, tell him to hide his face from me henceforth or I'll have him flayed alive. Up with you!"

Cyrano turned to his own horse, swung up into the saddle, and set forth in the wake of the vanished coach. His smashed lute was tossed aside. Dusting off his hat and plume, Cyrano twirled his mustache, put in his spurs, and passed through Palaiseau with all speed.

"So that rascal Avillon knew me!" he thought, as he cleared the town and discerned the dust cloud left by the coach. "I forgot what the woman said; I should have killed him. Yet, to what end? I put a handsome flea in his ear, and if he goes to Père Carré he'll learn a thing or two. Why did that rogue Mervaut presume so far? Strange! There's something behind his impudence; he seemed to know Avillon, too. What could lie between the lackey of Sieur d'Effiat and the confidential agent of Richelieu? And I should like to know just why Avillon should be drawing the blood of two Egyptians in the highway!"

Had he been back at the bend in the road where the two Egyptians lay, at this moment, Cyrano might have wondered still further. For Sieur d'Avillon, going to the body of the dead woman, had fallen upon his knees and was searching it swiftly. He rose, with an oath, and went to the man, and searched his ragged garments with the same ill luck. Then, suddenly, he began to scan the road for his own whip, and found it not—since it was being carried by Cyrano. Avillon kicked up the dust, searched hither and yon, and finally, realizing that the whip was gone, shook his fist at the sky with passionate despair in his dark face.

Truly, very singular actions to be indulged in by a gentleman and a confidential agent of the great cardinal!

CHAPTER VI.

—HAS AN ADVENTURE.

A SINGLE man riding posthaste, with change of horses at every stop, and ample authority, can certainly travel much faster than any coach. This very simple and obvious

fact might be the explanation of many puzzling things.

It might, for example, explain why the coach in which Marianne de Gisy was riding suddenly broke down two days after leaving Palaiseau. The breakdown occurred during their noon halt at a roadside tavern—a pleasant Norman inn with the not uncommon name of the White Horse. The whole front of the coach, springs and all, was certainly unfit to go a mile farther without repairs, and there was no other vehicle to be had. The innkeeper, however, stated that repairs might be made if men were summoned from Morthange, a village some five leagues distant. Cyrano, accordingly, sent on the coachman, disposed his charge in very comfortable quarters above the tavern, and made the best of a bad affair.

"We shall certainly be here until tomorrow," he said as he handed Marianne de Gisy to her room. "That rascal will take his time about bringing men or another coach, be sure of it!"

She stood smiling at him, in a way she had.

"Time was made for slaves, my dear marquis," she responded. "I shall sleep for an hour or two, and then rejoin you. Why worry?"

Why, indeed? Cyrano had not a worry on earth; he was filled with a joyous bursting happiness that took no heed to actualities. When Marianne smiled at him thus, he saw only her eyes, and they gripped his very soul.

"Dear lady," he said earnestly, as he bent over her hand and then looked again into her eyes, "remember only one thing of me, I pray you. Do not say: 'Cyrano loves me!' for this is not true. Say this: 'Cyrano worships the Queen of Heaven, for whom I was named—a dear shining lady so far above, so far away, that her presence is a sacred thing, a glorious revelation of beauty to his poor starved spirit.' *Au revoir,* my lady. Rest, and when you talk with the angels, say a little prayer for Cyrano."

So he left her and sat in the stone-paved wine room over a bottle, and wondered what it was in this woman which so drew him. Why was Effiat, that cold debauchee, so drawn to her in like manner? Not for mere beauty—there were others more beautiful by far in the externals—but for the spirit which lay behind and above all beauty; the spirit which Cyrano himself could not define, yet felt so deeply.

"Shining lady—aye, there it is!" he muttered. "Her eyes speak of peace, of happiness, of a high surety. And I, a poor monk, wandering aimless about the cloister, look to her as my Madonna."

Three cavaliers came stamping into the place, stopped short at sight of Cyrano, and exchanged a word among themselves. One of them stepped forward and bowed.

"*Monsieur,*" he said—he was a young man, a provincial noble from his appearance—"may I have the impertinence to request a favor? I am M. des Essarts; my two friends are M. le Baron d'Yvert and M. de Frontard. We find ourselves at a point of disagreement. It becomes important to find a fourth gentleman, one who may accompany us to a quiet spot and assist us by his presence to untangle our knot of discord. We find you here; excellent! If you will have the goodness?"

Cyrano rose, bowed magnificently, gave his name, and called for more wine.

"With all the pleasure in the world!" he declaimed. "I am under a vow not to bear sword, my friends, but that assuredly does not hinder me from

assisting a gentleman not under vow. And I may claim some little experience in the niceties of the duello, by my faith! Come, let us drink together, and I am at your service with all my heart!"

THE other two gentlemen joined them, emptied a bottle apiece, and in ten minutes all four went out to the courtyard. Cyrano obtained a horse, and they rode forth in great gayety upon their errand. Frontard and Yvert were at odds over some lady, it seemed; and if the matter had singular aspects, Cyrano was in mood to overlook them all.

A couple of miles from the tavern they came upon a grassy roadside glade, and the spot being approved, Cyrano swung out of the saddle. It was the last act of which he had any memory. Frontard's horse sidled in upon him, and next instant there was a crash—the pistol butt in Frontard's hand came down, and Cyrano knew no more.

"Well done!" exclaimed Baron d'Yvert. "Now for the whip."

He dismounted, caught up the braided whip which Cyrano had carried, and swiftly examined it. A nod and he pocketed it, then leaped into the saddle.

"*Adieu,* my friends!" Yvert cried. "Dispose of him as arranged!"

In this wise did the Marquis de Bergerac become separated from his lady.

When he wakened to himself he was sitting in a huge oaken chair in a strange room, a vile pain in his head, and candles alight on a table before him. It was night. A fire burned in a hearth at one side, and across the table sat M. de Frontard, reading a book.

"The devil!" exclaimed Cyrano in astonishment. "Where am I?"

"Not in purgatory, at all events," and Frontard, flinging aside his book, laughed a little. "My dear Bergerac, you are the victim of circumstances. A shabby trick was played upon you; in the morning you shall be free to go. Until then, you remain as my guest."

"Eh!" Cyrano stared at him. "But why? What does it mean?"

"It means"—and suddenly the eyes of Frontard bored into him—"that you had something belonging to another man. Need I mention the name of Avillon? Compose yourself, I beg of you; here I am master, force will avail nothing—ah, have a care, *monsieur!*"

Cyrano came to his feet and found himself looking into a pistol's mouth. He stood motionless an instant, then sank back into his chair.

"Very well, *monsieur,*" he said quietly. "But I was traveling with a lady—"

"Who has by this time been supplied with another coach and escort," said Frontard.

This jerked Cyrano sharply out of his whirling chaos. Servants entered, bringing an excellent dinner and superb wine; without a word more, Cyrano accepted the situation. The whip? This explained the matter in part. Let them have their little game, then; with morning there would come a new day. Desperately, Cyrano forced down impulse, conquered his mad urge to be up and repairing the wrong; and accepted his rôle. He looked across the table and smiled at Frontard.

"*Monsieur,* I am your guest, on your promise that I depart freely in the morning," he said. "Only, let me tell you one thing; at our next meeting I shall assuredly kill you. Until then it shall be as you desire."

"Your word, *monsieur?*"

"Faith of a gentleman," said Cy-

rano, and Frontard at once threw aside his pistol.

CYRANO gathered that he was in Frontard's house, and in no danger whatever. He yielded to the urge of hunger, and over the dinner table became rapidly acquainted with his host, a man of forty, who had served in the army and who knew the court. Frontard, he concluded, was a Huguenot noble, and Cyrano here ventured one question.

"Your pardon, *monsieur,* but curiosity urges! You have upset my plans, I gather, at the request of this Avillon. He is an emissary of the cardinal; yet you are a Huguenot."

"I happen to be his cousin, also," and Frontard smiled. "I have regained his lost property, not for love of Richelieu, but because my cousin requested it. You comprehend?"

Cyrano nodded. He perceived that the little whip must have been for some reason highly important—and suddenly he recalled the golden plate in the butt. Dispatches, of course! Inclosed in the whip were papers. This explained everything—or much, at least. Not the matter of those Egyptians . . .

"*Mordious!* I've been a fool!" he exclaimed, and broke into a laugh. "If you'd asked me for the whip I'd have given it you and saved a lot of trouble. Here's a health to the king, and—"

"And damnation to his eminence," said Frontard.

Dinner over, the fire was built up and Cyrano was delighted to see a chess table carried in by two servants. He loved the game, though he was none too apt at it, and an hour passed swiftly over the board. Suddenly a servant came hurriedly into the room and spoke a low word at his master's ear. Frontard started up.

"Here? Impossible!" he cried, a singular agitation in his features.

"With a single gentleman, *monsieur,*" said the servant.

"Wait—I'll come at once." Frontard turned to Cyrano. "*Monsieur,* will you accept my excuses? A gentleman has arrived to speak with me—I shall return shortly."

Frontard hurried from the room, and Cyrano, thinking little of the matter, relaxed, rubbed his sore pate, and poured another glass of wine. He did not like Frontard; the man was a gentleman, yet was possessed of a certain coldness of manner, a hard and inflexible spirit, a puritanical air distasteful to Cyrano.

The door opened, and two men came into the room. In advance of Frontard walked a tall man, carelessly attired, whose extremely handsome features at once drew Cyrano's attention. Pride was stamped in them, yet with the pride was something savage, unutterably harsh and cruel and intolerant.

Sieur de Lorges — what name was this? Cyrano bowed to Frontard's introduction, and cudgeled his brains hard. He knew the name, had heard it; this was no ordinary man, this Sieur de Lorges! Then the visitor turned to Frontard.

"Rest until midnight, then ride. To Doucy, first; there is much to do at the château. You are ready?"

Frontard assented, with a gesture of caution, and addressed Cyrano.

"*Monsieur,* important business is afoot; you comprehend? I beg you to excuse me. Your room is prepared; if I am not here in the morning I shall have you escorted whither you may desire to go."

"To the tavern where we met?" demanded Cyrano, and the other shrugged.

"If you like. But may I venture one word of advice, even if it be impertinent? Ride not to the west, *monsieur.*"

"Thank you, *monsieur,*" said Cyrano. "Is Sieur d'Avillon in the west, then?"

At the mention of this name, he saw Sieur de Lorges turn and stare at him.

"I do not know," said Frontard. "If he is your enemy, avoid him. He is no friend of mine, yet I have paid a debt and discharged it by this day's work."

"You have gained another debt, *monsieur,*" said Cyrano gravely. "And when you told me that the lady was already provided with another coach, you told me still more. M. d'Effiat is then not far away? He is, doubtless, a friend of yours?"

Frontard looked hard at him for a moment. Sieur de Lorges frowned and spoke.

"I do not comprehend this conversation; but it seems to me that you speak of certain gentlemen very carelessly. Names, *monsieur,* are dangerous."

Cyrano looked at him and laughed a little. "Exactly; but men are more dangerous still. I am glad to have the honor of your acquaintance, *monsieur;* perhaps we shall meet again in the west."

ONCE alone, Cyrano sank down on a chair, staring at nothing. That cruelly proud face, those bitter eyes—yes, he had seen it pictured somewhere, but not by such a name! And so Frontard had been in touch both with Avillon and with Effiat; singular fact! Those two men were not friends; Avillon, the Cardinalist agent, Effiat, a potential rebel.

"Ha!" exclaimed Cyrano suddenly. "I have it now. Jacques de Lorges? Aye, I know you now—Comte de Montgommery, son of the Huguenot Montgommery, who nearly captured our western fortress of Mont St. Michel during the religious wars—grandson of the Grand Montgommery who killed Henri II during a tournament and was executed for the deed. Ah, Montgommery, leader of the Huguenot party—so this is the man! And now what the devil is afoot, I wonder? Where does Effiat fit into this picture? And Avillon? Does this Montgommery think to surprise Mont St. Michel as his father did, with better luck this time? Well, with Huguenots and English together—ha!"

Rising, he crossed to the fire and stared down into the leaping flames. Conjecture could lead him nowhere; he had no clew as yet, but he felt something deep was afoot. Not for nothing had he himself been summoned to Mont St. Michel by Effiat. Not for nothing was the Montgommery riding about Normandy. Perhaps things were closer to a crisis than even Père Carré had supposed.

Cyrano's thoughts flew back to his own situation, not without a little sting of hurt pride. He was considered of small account, not even worth the killing. They had tricked him, got him out of the way; Avillon wanted that whip back, nothing else. But Avillon and Sieur d'Effiat would certainly not be working together.

Ah, the lackey Mervaut! There was the answer. Cyrano swore a deep oath of regret that he had not killed that lackey at the roadside. Mervaut and Avillon had probably joined forces and had planned this little affair; Avillon, to get back his lost dispatches, Mervaut to get rid of his master's friend. Cyrano's cheek burned, and he flung up his head.

"So Avillon, knowing who I really am, thinks me not worth the killing! We shall see about that, my friends. He is not so easily lost, not so easily discouraged, this Marquis of the Seven Stars! No, for there is something shining afar that leads him on—a shining lady whose eyes remain always with him day and night."

He began to undress, and suddenly broke into a chuckling laugh as his fingers touched the star-shaped reliquary Père Carré had hung about his neck.

"Ha, worthy father superior, your excellent Dominican ear must be burning to-night! Well, it's a pretty thing enough, but didn't save Cyrano from a devilish sore head, and perhaps a sore heart to boot, thanks to separation. Decidedly, St. Michael is not my patron; not when there's a Madonna who smiles at me, with blue eyes all gleaming like stars."

And Cyrano, pinching out the candles, knelt for a space in the flickering firelight.

Morning sunlight wakened him. A lackey responded to his call, and he found that his host had indeed departed during the night. Frontard, however, was as good as his word; an hour later beheld Cyrano mounted on an excellent horse, a groom at his side to guide him back to the inn of the White Horse, and all his personal belongings intact.

TO the tavern was only a matter of two leagues. Arriving there, the groom departed and Cyrano rode into the courtyard. A glance showed him that the coach was gone; the host came forth, threw up his hands, and in reply to Cyrano's questions stated that the vehicle had been repaired the previous afternoon. Two gentlemen had arrived with a letter for the lady, who had departed under their escort.

Pressed for a description of the two cavaliers, the host complied readily. Neither of them, Cyrano discovered, had been Effiat; one, with a wealed and angry face, must have been Mervaut. The lady had betrayed some agitation, but had departed willingly. More than this, Cyrano could learn nothing at all.

Thus baffled, finding his worst fears come true, Cyrano exchanged Frontard's horse for his own, loaded his pistols, and set forth upon the western road toward Mont St. Michel.

He rode with the sole purpose of overtaking the coach, finding Marianne de Gisy again, and continuing at her side. How she had been tricked or intimidated into leaving, he could not understand; the letter would explain it readily enough. Since she was not the sort of person to be easily deceived, he inclined to the belief that she had gone with Mervaut as the part of wisdom.

"Aye, that's it!" he concluded, plucking up his spirits. "The letter said that I was drunk or detained, and that Mervaut would take my place. Who wrote the letter? Mervaut and Avillon between them, forging Effiat's hand. Hence, it's clear enough that Mervaut will betray his master to Avillon, or has already done so—if there's aught to betray! And Marianne went, knowing that if I were alive I'd meet her again at Mont St. Michel. There's a woman for you, a blessed shining lady on the mountain top! She may well stand beside the Archangel St. Michael himself and beckon me to the mount!"

So Cyrano rode on into the west. But of his shining lady he had found no trace.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Unloading from the freight, he sideswiped the girl before she could dodge

No More Boomers

Hug Williams, charter member of the drifting fraternity of railroad boomers, collides head-on with trouble

By WILLIAM EDWARD HAYES

HUGO W. WILLIAMS, boomer brakeman—commonly known as "Hug" to that itinerant brotherhood of "shacks"—dropped his dark and moody scowl the moment he entered the Harvey yard office. Within two seconds he was aware that he had butted into a serious business conference; but what he heard passing between the two men who stood by the battered old desk, seemed to him the best assurance in the world that here at last was a job.

Hug paused respectfully, hat in hand, hope kindling in his eyes as they regained their normal smiling expression. That heavy-set feller there—the one with the red face—must be Ballard, the trainmaster, Hug figured, judging from his bombastic remarks. The lean, hungry-looking guy with the dark visage and the stained brown derby perched on his dome at a go-to-hell angle couldn't be anybody else but the yardmaster.

"You took a hell of a lot on yourself, Cutter," the trainmaster bawled, "to go an' let two brakemen lay off right now. Look! Here you got 71 laid out with sixty cars of hot merchandise just because you haven't got a full crew."

"Them men was sick," Cutter protested. "Been workin' 'em sixteen hours outta every twenty-four for a month. You hire me some brakemen an' I'll move all the trains you can give me."

"You're gonna have to answer to the super about this one," Ballard pounded the desk. "Y'know we had to do some tall competin' against the Milwaukee to get that westbound business."

"Listen, cap." Hug saw Cutter thrust his dark jaw into the trainmaster's face. "I move trains when I got crews, see? An' if this damn' streak of railroad can't hire enough men to keep business goin', to hell with the business! It ain't my fault. I ain't no miracle man, an' crews is your job."

"Yeh, an' you lissen to me," Ballard spouted. "You get one of them men back on the job right now. You'll get 71 rollin' in the next hour or you'll speak your piece to the old man. Don't yell at me about no men. You! Every time one of your men comes bellyachin' around, you let him lay off. It's your fault if we're short-handed."

HUG swallowed hard, blinked twice, tried to look his most impressive self. He shifted his hundred and sixty pounds to his right foot, got set for his approach. Here was a job and a job meant grub!

"Ex-excuse me, Mr. Ballard," Hug opened modestly. "You needin' good brakemen that way, maybe I could—"

Ballard's glare stopped Hug in his tracks.

"Well!" There was nothing kindly in the trainmaster's eyes. "Who the hell let you in here?"

"Why, I just walked in."

"Brakeman?"

"Yes, sir," said Hug.

"Where'd you ever brake?"

"I've had about ten years experience," Hug offered, brightening and reaching to his inside breast pocket for his service letters. "I worked for several roads." Hug brought out the papers. "Oregon Short Line in Pocatello—"

"Yow!" yelped the trainmaster. "I knew it! Knew it by lookin' at you! Another damn' boomer!"

Hug winced.

"Get to hell outta here! I'd rather hire a greenhorn from the wheat fields than put another no-good, drifting, shiftless boomer to work on this pike."

"I just heard you say you had a hot shot that had to move," Hug said.

"Yeh! An' you heard me say get out, too," snapped Ballard. "This ain't a boomer road no more. You fellers 're good for nothin' but trouble. Tear out!"

"But I gotta go to work," Hug argued, hitching up his trousers over a rather flat and empty stomach.

"No more boomers!" yelled Ballard. "No more boomers!"

"What a hell of a fancy trainmaster you are," Hug hurled back. "No more boomers, eh? To hell with you!" Hug was good and sore. He whirled about and left the office.

It was late in May, rather balmy for Montana. But the brilliant sun, the soft zephyrs didn't mean a thing to the hungry brakeman whose scowl returned as he headed back to the Harvey passenger station, a mile west up the main line.

With every step he kicked at the gravel viciously, cursed the fates that'd had a hand in sending him to Harvey, cursed the memory of a fluffy blonde back in Spokane who'd lied so scandalously about being single and whose lie he held directly responsible for his jobless state.

"I'll bet a stack it's all that damn' clerk's fault," mused Hug, mumbling to himself as he again thought of Ballard. "I oughta go back up to Ballard's office an' sock him one."

Hug was sure that Ben Kistler, the trainmaster's clerk, whom he had encountered twice within the hour, had called Ballard at the yard office ahead of Hug's visit. The boomer had just come into Harvey at noon on a freight from the west, and had been unfortunate in unloading from a coal car at the platform while it was rolling at better than twenty per.

Ben, Ballard's clerk, had been standing on the platform with a willowy brunette, and Hug hadn't seen either until it was too late; until he'd let go the grab iron. He'd shouted a warning, and saw the clerk make a wild dive to safety. But the girl hadn't been quick enough and Hug had sideswiped her, bowling her over while he himself hit the platform on his shoulder.

The girl had taken it good-naturedly, had even flashed Hug a smile—a smile that made Hug forget, for the moment at least, that he'd sworn off women for life. Ten minutes later he'd encountered Ben Kistler again in Ballard's office above the station. He had been grossly insulted by the slim, sleek-haired, swarthy-faced clerk, and had retorted by offering to smack him down. Then, after further threats of dire physical punishment, Hug made Ben reveal the trainmaster's whereabouts. Now he had walked that mile to the yard office, only to be insulted again.

"NO more boomers!" Hug repeated Ballard's words with a snarl. "What the hell is this country comin' to, anyway? Wantin' to train home guards. Take guys from farms an' teach 'em this game. Keep 'em on one pike all their lives. Hunh! One hell of a way to railroad."

Hug's eyes were downcast as he reached the platform. That was why he saw her trim, silk-clad ankles first. He looked up and stopped suddenly. Before him, her frank eyes smiling, stood the girl he'd knocked for a loop when he'd unloaded from the freight.

"You're the man, all right," the girl said with a drawl that suggested Texas. "Wild-eyed boomer, blue suit, blue shirt with a starched collar an' a polka-dot tie. Yep. A mighty good description, at that."

"Excuse me, miss," Hug opened in bewilderment, not knowing just what to say.

"Oh, don't get flusterated," said the girl. "It's all right. I was just told to watch out for you an' head you off."

"Head me off?" Hug frowned, then broke into a winning grin. "I guess that don't surprise me none. I been headed off every way I turned, since I landed in this town."

"Sure 'nough," beamed the girl. "I did head you off once before to-day, an' I almost got my neck broken, too. But it's business this time. You see, Cutter—he's the yardmaster—he called me on the phone a few minutes ago, an' told me if I saw a wild-eyed boomer in a blue suit coming up this way, to head him off an' send him right back."

"Yeh?" Hug was heartened visibly. "I just ast Ballard for a job down there. Maybe he changed his mind."

"I don't know about Ballard," said the girl. "It's Cutter who wants you. Ballard's hard on boomers. Going to make this division over an' get men who'll stay put."

"What do you know about boomers, anyway?" Hug was interested.

"Why, I'm sort of one myself," the

girl chuckled, her deep eyes dancing. "Maybe I better explain. I'm an extra telegraph operator. Pounding brass right here while the day man's taking a lay-off."

"I see," said Hug. Then more seriously, "I—I guess I better beat it back down to Cutter, an' maybe I'll be seein' you again."

"Well, maybe," said the girl, and Hug read encouragement in her voice.

The boomer started, turned back once, saw the girl enter the depot. He then lit out for the grimy, weather-beaten office down the yards.

"Listen, bo," Cutter addressed Hug a few minutes later. "You achin' to go to work pretty bad?"

"Damn' bad," Hug replied, thinking of a brunette female brass pounder.

"I'm gonna take a chance. See? I'm gonna put you on this 71. That dumb trainmaster said I had to take the responsibility to get it movin'."

"He didn't say hire me?" Hug blinked.

"You heard what he said about that when you ast him!" Cutter grinned. "Naw. But I'm puttin' you on that run. Maybe when you get back in a couple days you can speak to him. He might change his mind. He's sore now because the old man's ridin' him pretty hard."

"Speak to him?" Hug didn't like the idea. "Maybe he'd fire me an' you both."

"Hell, you ain't got nothin' to lose," said Cutter. "You gotta go to work. I gotta move a train. I'll chalk you up on the extra board an' they ain't no law compellin' you ever to see Ballard again.

"Not if you don't want to. If you dodge him maybe you can get by for a couple of months."

Hug's empty stomach troubled him, the vision of a comely lady on a station platform heartened him. He didn't take more than a second to decide.

CUTTER dug up an old pair of overalls and advanced a dollar for chow. Hug ate, and returned to the office. Finding Skipper Manlove's caboose, he reported, and got the engine. Within another thirty minutes he was highballing west on 71, hiding well behind the back-head of the boiler as the trainload of merchandise shot pounded up past the Harvey depot on its way to Granite Falls, the division point next west.

On his return to Harvey in the late afternoon, two days after, Hug had a quarter in his overall s pocket. He donated this to a call boy to secure for him the name of a young lady who worked the day trick at the station, and the address at which she could be reached.

The call boy made good and Hug made a date. Yardmaster Cutter, who'd been the world's greatest boomer himself, came across handsomely with a five-dollar note. This money Hug spent partly for a new shirt, a barber pole tie, and a hard collar. He had two dollars left with which to keep his date with Miss Cleo Geer.

Hug was dolled up in fashion when he called for Cleo about eight.

"Guess you didn't look for such sudden action as this," Hug grinned as he joined her on the porch of her boarding house.

"Boomers are mighty sudden, most times," said Cleo. "But I had a hunch I'd hear from you. I knew you'd be coming in when I heard Manlove's train list coming in over the wire." They started up Main Street. Hug looked warily about him.

"Knew I went to work, then," he

said, eyes alert for any sign of Trainmaster Ballard or Ben, the clerk.

"Sure 'nough," said Cleo. "I got a glimpse of you hiding behind the boiler head when 71 went by that afternoon."

Hug made a mental note to hide more thoroughly after this when passing points where Ballard or Ben might chance to see him. He didn't breathe freely until he and Cleo were safely seated in the dark of the movie house. Even then he contemplated the fact that trainmasters and clerks also went to movies, for he didn't want these individuals to be wondering about his presence in their midst.

So far as he knew neither Ballard nor Ben knew what his name was, but it wouldn't be hard to trace a face—especially since that face had been thrust under the nose of the clerk in anger, and had bawled out the trainmaster himself.

Hug got by safely for a month, finding it an easier matter than he'd imagined to dodge Mr. Ballard and his office help. During that time Cleo had become a habit and an obsession with him, to say nothing of a passion. In her he'd found something he'd never experienced with the women he had known in ten years of booming the country.

He learned something about her history, her birth in Texas, her education as a school-teacher, and her studying telegraphy with a brother who worked on the T. & P. She confessed her fascination with railroading, and her subsequent travels.

In turn he told Cleo everything about himself, good and bad, had progressed with her from the point where they'd first begun to hold hands beneath his hat brim in the movie to where she was calling him "Sugar" and he was calling her "Hon."

He had progressed, in fact, to the point where Hug decided it was time to do something about it. He thought of suggesting that they double-head it, and he had a pretty good idea that Cleo wouldn't object.

Hug recognized two first-class difficulties. It was going to be hard to get started. Then, his job could be blown out from under him any minute. Not that he cared a lot about the job itself. But, supposing Cleo did say yes, and he lost out—it would mean he'd have to go somewhere else, away from Cleo, and this he didn't want to do. He'd had two paydays, good ones, and there was the sum of a hundred dollars he'd laid by.

THE boomer lay awake half of Saturday night, right at the end of June, and tried to make up his mind. The next day would be an off one for him. He'd been on the Madison branch line local for a week, and it didn't work Sunday. Cleo was through at Harvey station. Hug decided to take the plunge.

Hug's heart was in his mouth, his insides jumpy, as he sat perilously close to Cleo on the horsehair sofa in the old-fashioned parlor. The quiet of the late Sunday afternoon seemed more pronounced, the setting sun shot long fingers of paling light through the lace curtains across the rose patterns of the mail order Axminster.

"Hon, you know I been thinkin'," he launched from dry lips, paused timorously.

"What?" Cleo encouraged, slipping her soft hand into his.

"Why—uh—I guess I don't need to tell you—"

"Tell me," she breathed, squeezing his hand, resting her bobbed head on his shoulder, looking up to get his eyes.

Then he told her, stammeringly but seriously, got it out somehow, and slipped an arm about her. The next thing he knew she had kissed him.

He felt the blood burn under his cheeks. A great something overpowered him, a feeling of infinite strength, as he pressed her hungrily to him. He wanted to cry out, shout, wring Ballard's neck, or shake his hand. It didn't matter. The world was a damn' swell place. And this kid, here, this soft, strong parcel of female loveliness—she was his, all his!

The Madison mixed local had a different atmosphere to Hug the following morning. The dinky old engine, the half dozen or more freight cars and the battered old wooden coach on the rear, which served for passengers, mail and express, looked to Hug like the road's best-varnished shot. He slapped "Bucolic" Boone, the ancient, wrinkled conductor, on the back, made Bucolic cough and frown.

Up through Beltane, the first stop out, and on to Pinto Point where a great construction gang was cutting through a new branch line to a boom mine settlement, Hug walked on the air. He sang, joked, laughed and annoyed the entire crew, but he kept his secret to himself. The day was sunny and glad. Between stations Hug rode out in the glorious atmosphere. Large and lovely loomed the smiling face, the full curved lips, the deep dark eyes of Cleo.

REACTION set in along in the afternoon. It began when fleecy clouds which had been riding the sky, started to mass on the northwest horizon. The local had reached Madison, had completed its work, and was now on its way back to town.

In the express compartment of the wooden coach, Hug had to ride with the expressman. A revolver hung heavily in the hip pocket of his pants, for the expressman had charge of a pay roll bound for Pinto. It amounted to something like twenty thousand dollars in bills and silver, and was for the construction gang who would be paid off on the following day, July 1.

There was no bank in Pinto, so the railroad company had agreed to get the money down on the local and deposit it in the station safe overnight. The construction officials would pick it up in the morning and pay off. They had no safe, so they figured the money better stay in the depot.

Hug thought it was a rotten idea. He said so to Bucolic Boone. Bucolic just laughed. They'd been doin' it thataway since April an' nothin' happened to it yet, so Bucolic explained.

Hug turned his thoughts to Cleo, and the future. Valiantly he tried to shake off that queer sense of something bearing down on him. He'd force a grin now and then, just looking off into space, He thought of Ballard, the clerk and his precarious job. How he hoped there'd be no trouble!

But trouble started at five fifty that evening, just as Hug opened the main line switch to let the Madison local off the branch line a half mile below the yards.

He'd got the switch open when, looking up to give the hogger a come-ahead sign, he caught his breath at sight of two darkly glittering eyes looking straight at him. His own eyes widened at the expression, first of recognition, then of amazement, then of a sneer that he saw flash across Ben Kistler's swarthy face. He saw Ben's lower jaw drop, saw the strangely hawklike face of the man with Ben, then the engine came between them.

Wiped out was the sunshine, the feeling of infinite strength. Hug caught the grab irons on the gangway of the engine as it came by, and hoisted himself to the deck, weak and trembling. He felt his heart pumping strangely fast. Blackness seemed to wall up about him. Ben! Ballard! Cleo!

Like a man in a trance he registered in, changed clothes, washed. He wanted to get to Cleo's side as quickly as his legs would take him there. Maybe her voice, her reassuring smile, would calm that crazy sense of being lost and desolate.

Cleo listened while he told the story, the half amused smile gradually fading from her curving lips. Hug looked blankly at the central pattern of the rug, felt Cleo's hand in his, the pressure that she gave it.

"I—I gotta leave town," Hug finally said, turning to her. "He's—he's gonna turn me in."

Cleo's small but capable hands found his shoulders. She turned him full about to face her.

"Listen to me," she counseled, forcing a smile. "You're not going to leave town. You're not going to do anything but come an' go on your schedule. You leave Ben to me. I knew him long before you came along an' I know how to handle his type. You just leave him to me."

"What you gonna do?" Hug asked, startled.

"I'm going to work out something," said Cleo with a slight frown. "It 'll take more'n Ben Kistler to break up—"

"No, Hon," Hug said firmly, lips tight in a grim line. "I gotta beat it. I don't want you in a position of owin' that squirt anything. He can turn me in. That's all right. I'll just hit the next division until we get a stake."

"We'll get our stake together, right here," Cleo affirmed. "We're not going to be scared by him."

"But lissen, Clee," Hug interrupted. "If you go askin' anything of that feller, he'll—he'll—"

"He'll do what Cleo says." There was a snap to her voice, a firmness, a note that Hug hadn't heard before. "Now calm down, Hon. Maybe he doesn't even remember you. There isn't anything that can stand in our way. We're going to be happy, Big Boy. Happy!"

SHE had Hug eat supper with her. She teased, kidded, did everything to bring a smile to his lean, brown face. Hug responded remarkably, telling himself everything was going to be okay. They went back to the parlor at seven thirty, lit the lamp. Cleo would even play a tune on the old piano.

"Smile, Sugar," said Cleo. "Why, we can almost hear those wedding bells right now."

Cleo heard a bell right then. So did Hug. It was rather insistent, coming from the telephone on the wall in the hall beyond. Cleo took the receiver, stood on tiptoe to reach the transmitter.

"Hello," Hug heard her say. "Yes . . . yes . . . What? . . . Well, for Heaven's sake . . . How'll I do it? . . . All right. Right away."

Hug heard the receiver go back on its hook, saw Cleo had lost her cheerful countenance as she came back.

"It's the night man at Pinto," Cleo explained. "He had to go an' collapse on duty when I thought we were going to have a nice evening alone. The chief dispatcher says I have to go—the only extra operator in town."

"Pinto!" Hug took a step toward her. "You? At Pinto?"

"Why, Hug! What's wrong with —with that?"

He told her about the pay roll in the safe. He didn't like the idea anyway. Too many roughnecks hived up at the camp a mile and a half back in the hills.

"Hug, Sugar," she smiled. "don't be that way. I've worked Pinto before. But I have to hurry. The chief said I could ride over on an extra that was called for seven fifty."

"I'm gonna go with you," Hug called to her as she dashed up the stairs.

"You're going to stay here so's you can make your run in the morning," Cleo called back.

He walked with her, protesting against her going alone to Pinto. They made their way to the yards in the gathering shadows. But Cleo insisted she'd be all right. She'd get the postmistress to come over and sit with her until she closed the office, which would be at two in the morning.

"An' just think, Sugar," she said brightly, "I'll wait an' come home with you on the local to-morrow afternoon. Won't that be nice?"

Hug mumbled something about maybe there wouldn't be any local for him to-morrow, but Cleo laughed it off.

"You mind Cleo," she said. "You won't be turned in."

Hug placed her aboard Skipper Manlove's caboose just before the hind man waved a highball, and just after he'd planted a farewell kiss on her lips in the shadow of a "bad order" cattle car.

He was about to begin to feel easier about her at least when he spied a dark form running head-on through the shadows toward Manlove's moving extra. At the moment the man came abreast with the end of the cattle car, a car repairman came around the end of it, and for just a fleeting second Hug saw the runner's face, a dark, hawk-like face, in the gleam of the car tonk's flaring light.

Hug stopped in his tracks, turned, frowned. It was the man he'd seen that afternoon with Ben Kistler, and the man surely seemed in one large hurry to get some place.

"What the heck?" he asked himself dumbly, but found no immediate answer.

Hug had just reached Main Street again, and was pondering on whether to go to his room when he was arrested by a voice, calling his name. He turned, saw Yardmaster Cutter, brown derby on the back of his head, come up.

"I been lookin' all over fer you," said Cutter. "Just come from your boardin' house."

Hug felt the wind go out of his sails. Panic seized him.

"You ain't heard bad news, have you?"

"Maybe it's gonna be bad if you give it time," said Cutter. "I seen Ben Kistler awhile ago. He was askin' about a tramp brakeman name o' Williams."

"The hell he was!" Hug's fists clenched, eyes blazed.

"YEH. In fact he come to the yard office, snoopin' around. I seen him in the crew room studyin' the board, then he come bustin' in on me an' wanted to know where this feller Williams come from, an' who hired him. I said I guessed Ballard did."

"Let's move on," Hug growled. "We'll be collectin' a party here." He marched forward, Cutter at his side. "What'd he say then?"

"He might's well said I was lyin'," answered Cutter. "He said I knew damn' well Ballard didn't hire no tramps, an' he said he wanted to make sure he wasn't seein' things. Said he seen you on the local."

Hug brushed a hand across his knitted brow as Cutter went on:

"'Yeh,' I says, 'that's Williams, all right,' an' he says he thought he seen you around town a time or two, out with his girl, but he thought—"

"What 'd he mean, his girl?" Hug snorted, and stopped to face Cutter.

"I don't know. You got a girl?"

"Yeh," Hug scowled darkly. "I gotta girl."

"Did she work the day trick up at the depot?"

"Yeh. She did."

"Damme if you ain't a card," chuckled the boomer yard master. "Come into town, go to work on a man's railroad without him hirin' you, an then take away his chief clerk's gal. Hell, feller, if they let you stay here coupla years you'd be ownin' the damn' railroad."

"You mean he used to chase after that girl?" demanded Hug.

"Don't blow up, kid," the yard master cautioned as they moved on again. "Yeh. He chased her. Didn't do him a hell of a lotta good that I ever seen. Looks like he couldn't get a tumble outta her, but that ain't changed his mind about her. Naw, sir."

"What you mean?"

"I kinda got interested in this girl business when he made that crack about you bein' out with her, so I ast him what he was gonna do about it. He said he was gonna do plenty, an' made a big noise about how he'd have the young lady any time he was a mind to."

"I guess I'm—I'm—gonna kill—"

Hug's voice was deadly. The yard master put a restraining hand on his arm.

"Don't go losin' your head," said Cutter. "That girl 'll take care of herself, an' if you let her handle this thing—"

Hug whirled about, again stopping. That's what Cleo had suggested. Said she'd take care of Ben.

"I'm gonna take care of this my own self," said Hug firmly. "I'm gonna—"

He left the yard master staring after him, turned about, went back to his locker at the yard office crew room.

So Kistler could have Cleo any time he wanted to make a play for her!

Almost blinded by the rage that surged up within him, Hug took from his locker the revolver that he'd used that day on the Pinto pay roll detail. He shoved the weapon into his pocket after having inspected it to see that it was loaded and ready for duty. It was an ancient thirty-eight, but it could do a lot of damage. Hug then buttoned his coat over it, went in to see the night crew dispatcher, and found out Ben Kistler's address.

As he walked through the sultry night, starless and moonless with impending storm, the red flush of anger cleared from his brain, and in its place came a cold, steady, deathly resolve. Ben Kistler would account to him for a statement made about Cleo Geer in a division yard office.

BEN KISTLER was not at home. He'd just left for the office, so his landlady said, maybe half an hour ago. He was to meet Mr. Ballard there. Hug turned about, after mumbling his thanks, and went to the passenger station.

His fingers closed over the black

butt of the revolver as he climbed the stairs. Then he held his hand in front of him. It was perfectly steady. Funny how calm he felt when he was going to kill a man!

Hug halted a moment at the top of the stairs, took a deep breath, then advanced to the door that bore Ballard's name. His hand gripped the knob. Slowly, steadily he turned, pushed open the door.

A light was burning over the square desk just beyond the railing inside. Cigarette smoke still hung in a motionless cloud on the heavy air. The room was deserted. Hug stealthily opened the gate, advanced to the desk. A dozen cigarette stubs lay in an old ash tray. One was still burning.

Hug glared at the door marked "Private," took his gun from his pocket. Suddenly he opened that door, only to be faced by yawning darkness. Sharply he caught his breath. Taut nerves were near the snapping point.

"Hell!" Hug breathed the word. It sounded like a sharp hiss.

He replaced his revolver, walked back to the desk, sat down under the light. His eyes stared ahead, unseeing. His brain was beginning to feel like a ball of fire in his head.

His eyes fell on a yellow pad in the center of the desk. His lean fingers closed over the blank top sheet, caught it up in a convulsive gesture. The sheet crumpled in his hard hand, and with it was a short piece of carbon paper that had been underneath.

Hug started violently, stared fixedly at what now caught his eyes. His jaw dropped as he studied the scrawl of the carbon impression—a series of scrawls like a man sometimes makes when he's talking into a telephone, and toys with a pencil on paper before him. There was a name facing Hug, a name which shot through his brain, and below it was a series of figures. They'd been traced over and over.

"Good Gawd!" The exclamation came from between clenched teeth. And in another second Hug went into action. He bolted from the room like a shot, dashed down the stairs, tore out in the direction of the yards.

Of one thing he was sure. There would shortly be, if there was not at this moment, hell to pay at Pinto Point. He saw before him as he ran a vision of a lean, hawk-like face in the glare of a car toad's lantern, and mingled with this he saw a series of scrawls on the piece of message blank which he carried in his coat.

Past switch lights, alongside cars in cluttered tracks the boomer ran. His heart was pounding in his ears while his mind centered on a slip of a girl at a lonely office sixteen miles down the branch line grade.

Hug brought up panting at a string of shanties which belonged to the maintenance of way department. He stopped at the tool house, saw the dozing form of the night man, saw a little gasoline car standing there on the spur.

The boomer made a stab for the "bug," roused the sleeping man as he cranked the thing in gear, shoving it along the rails. The engine coughed, broke into a heartening chug-chug.

The man in the tool house tried to stop him, ask a question. But Hug only shoved him off, clattering away over switch points. The man tried to give chase, but sleep had been too heavily upon him.

Heart in his mouth, stopping here and there to lift the little car over switches set against him, Hug finally made the branch line, opened his throttle wide, and tore away through the blackness to interfere with what he

firmly believed to be a well-planned date with his girl.

TWICE Hug nearly took to the ditch as he urged the bug to the limit. It was almighty still and hot and black in the hills. Jagged shafts of lightning played through the sky.

Hug roared through Beltane like a ghost, took the rise beyond, and felt the speed of the bug slacken perceptibly. He leaned forward tensely as the car reached the summit of the hill, then gathered momentum on the downgrade.

The storm broke with intensity at the moment Hug killed the engine on the curving breast of the slope down into Pinto. He had no sense of time.

Drenched by the beating rain, Hug slipped the brake against the whirling wheels as he rounded the jut of rock on the bend above the telegraph office. He could see the yellow glow of the windows dimly. The rest of Pinto had gone to sleep.

A hundred yards away from the light glow Hug jumped running to the ties. He snatched the bug off the rails, shoved it into the ditch. Then, with bated breath he ran forward, stumbling. The wind howled unmercifully, and once, in a blinding flash of lightning, his heart almost stopped. He was nearing the platform, and the sudden illumination revealed a black, curtained touring car, right up at the depot door. In that flash he'd seen a man in a slicker, gun drawn, facing the lighted windows.

Hug gave another spurt forward, swung wide to gain the back of the building, prayed that the blackness would hold ten seconds more.

Another sharp, blinding flash brought him out in bold relief at the platform's edge. Almost before the light had died away a pistol barked, a hoarse voice yelled. Both sounds were drowned by the deafening crash of thunder.

Hug pitched headlong, then scrambled to his feet as he felt a hot sting along his hip. There was a wince of pain, then he was pushing along, round the south end of the station. He crouched low against the weatherboarding, and crawled along to the yellow rays of light which marked the rear window of the telegraph room.

The sound of running feet crashing through the cinders came to his ears above the howl of the gale. He swung on one knee, bent low, saw a coated form right over him. Hug reached for his revolver and got his hand on it when a gun barrel pressed against his neck.

"Up outta there, you, an' quiet," a heavy voice growled down to him. Hug straightened. The pistol poked his ribs. He knew the chances were a thousand to one against him, but he didn't stop to consider. His lean knee came upward out of the dark with terrific force, caught his captor in the pit of the stomach. At the same time Hug's left hand closed on the barrel of the gun and his right sloughed into a beefy face.

The struggle that ensued was short, punctuated by one shot, and Hug felt the grappling figure fall away from him, slump to the ground.

Quickly, gun leveled ahead of him, Hug made the front of the station. The car was deserted, the motor running. He'd got the lookout man. Then Hug entered the waiting room, tried the office door. It was locked from the inside. He was just backing away to give the door a smash with his shoulder when the light went out beyond the

ticket window. There came to his ears the rumble of male voices. It sounded like two men. Beyond that door was Cleo; and Hug was going in.

Hug's powerful shoulder smashed the ancient door.

A woman's scream pierced the momentary stillness. Two tongues of flame licked out, two sharp reports, and the fight was on.

No more shots were fired in those close quarters. Hoarse oaths, dull grunts. The solid impact of hard fist meeting flesh. Hug waded in. The pain in his hip had become terrific, but he passed it from mind.

"Keep—clear—ba—babe!" he panted, to let Cleo know he was there. He didn't know whether she'd answered, whether she could answer. His short speech had won him a clout over the ear—a blow which staggered him. Half dazed, he felt himself sinking. He was getting weak.

Back to his feet he struggled. Groping hands almost had his throat. He ducked, side stepped, slid away. There was the bang of a body crashing against the door. He grinned. They were fighting themselves. Slowly he began to circle away from the scuffle, his hands extended behind him, guiding himself by the sound of muffled instruments on the telegraph table. Then his hands touched a chair. He sensed an enemy—maybe two or more—moving toward him. Cursing, snarling. If he could only hoist the chair—

"Yow!" he shouted, made the effort. High above his head the chair was swung. Down it came with a bewildering crash. Only a grunt and the thud of a heavy body against the floor. He was slipping badly now, but he slashed out again, ducked, swirled. This time, as the chair came down with all the force he could put behind it, he dropped with it. And he went out. Hopelessly, ingloriously out.

A COOL wind fanned Hug's brow. He batted his eyes open, saw only darkness. His eyes burned like two balls of fire in his brain. The pain in his hip brought a startled cry.

"Lie still, Hon," he heard Cleo's voice. "I'll have you all fixed up in a minute."

He tried to answer her, but no words would come. If he could only get a drink of water. There was a sudden lurch, then he was aware, as the pain shot through his leg again, that he was moving, riding in something that certainly bounced like the very devil. Dimly he made out that it was a curtained automobile.

"It won't be long, Sugar," came Cleo's reassuring voice. He slumped back, weak, dizzy. The car hit another bump, and Hugo W. Williams, hard-boiled boomer of the road, fainted dead away.

The investigation was held at the side of a little white bed in the hospital at Harvey. The center of attention was a bandaged boomer brakeman who lay on the flat of his back with his head bound up, a wrist in splints, and a hip that throbbed like nobody's business.

A company surgeon stood at the head of the bed, a girl sat next to him, a gruff, red-faced division official was in a chair next to the girl, and a lean, brown-faced individual bearing a striking resemblance to a boomer yard master, stood at the foot, toying with a battered old brown derby.

"You can only talk to Williams a few minutes," the surgeon advised.

"Only a question or two," said Trainmaster Ballard.

"How do you feel, Sugar?" asked the girl.

Hug reached his good right arm out and took the girl's hand.

"I guess I'm gettin' along all right, Hon," he said. "Little tired."

"Williams," said the trainmaster, "you been ravin' two days now; now let me do the talkin' before you get too weak to answer again. You maybe don't know it, but you just about killed five men the other day."

"Five?" Hug frowned.

"You an' this little telegraph operator put together," Ballard amended. "An' maybe you won't ever be able to tell exactly about that. All we know is that this young woman showed up in Harvey close to midnight in a captured automobile with you about dead an' three tough guys trussed up on the back seat. The other two was left at Pinto with a construction boss that she'd plowed a mile an' a half through the storm to wake up. One of 'em was dead—found back of the station—an' the other so battered his ma'd never know him. I asked her an' she said you did it—did the wholesale job of cleanin' those boys up. She said she'd merely tapped one bird on the head with a twenty-inch stove poker when a flash of lightnin' showed him up just as you went down with a busted chair an' your third victim.

"You see," the trainmaster went on, "they hadn't done anything to this girl here, but they'd bound up the postmistress who was stayin' with her. The gent this young lady accounted for as you were goin' down, was keepin' a gun on her while the other three tackled the safe, because it was the best intentions of one of those guys to take this girl with him."

"You—you mean Kistler?" Hug tried to raise himself.

"Easy, son," said the doctor, shoving him back.

"Kistler," confirmed Ballard.

"Di—did we get him all right?"

"Get him?" The trainmaster snorted. "I'll say you got him. They're gonna be pickin' pieces of that chair outta his head for a week. He's up on the top floor of this hospital now. Under guard."

"HE didn't get in the safe, then?" Hug's eyes widened.

"Just got the door open," said the trainmaster, "when the fireworks started. He's one of the guys this girl brought back in the car. The construction boss helped her load 'em in, an' when he went to get his coat to go 'long with her, she just tore out."

Hug shot another look at Cleo. What a girl!

"She even brought that pay roll to town. Turned it over to the chief dispatcher so's it could go back on the local the next mornin'. But what I got outta her don't give me any light on just why you did your end of this. That's what I wanna know. How'd you ever know about what was goin' on at Pinto, an' why did you stage this party all by yourself?"

Hug frowned, turned to the window, then back to Ballard.

"Somebody bring me my coat," he mumbled, eyes on Cleo.

Those around the bed waited tensely silent until the garment was brought.

"Cleo," said Hug, "they's a piece of yeller message paper in the pocket, or they oughta be. Give it to Mr. Ballard."

Cleo brought the piece of crumpled paper to light. Ballard opened the slip, stared, blinked. Cleo, looking over his elbow, frowned.

"Why—why, say!" Ballard looked up. "This 's the combination to the Pinto safe."

"Yeh," said Hug, and explained briefly that he'd gone to Ballard's office on the night of June 30 to see Ben Kistler. "Never mind what for. I ain't gonna say, but I was pretty sore about a certain matter."

The trainmaster looked at Cleo, then at Hug.

"You just tell me about this," said Ballard.

Hug then explained that he'd sat at the desk, tore off a sheet of paper from the pad, took a piece of carbon with it, and found the slip Ballard held in his hand.

"YOU see, it was a short piece of carbon," Hug explained. "One of them kind that we're always cussin' because it don't cover all the paper you're writin' on when you're makin' a report. Nobody woulda known that piece of paper was between them sheets. Kistler'd wrote down them figgers an' that name on the top sheet of what he thought was just a blank batch of papers. He tore the sheet off an' left a blank page facin' him. He didn't know that whoever had used that pad before him stuck the carbon paper in two sheets deep instead of one.

"I seen that, an' in a flash like I remembered that hawk-nosed guy I seen beatin' it to catch Manlove's extra—the same guy I'd seen Kistler talkin' to a little while before. An'—well, I just decided I better go to Pinto Point. If Kistler hadn't wrote down the name of the station with them figgers, I wouldn't noticed it. But thinkin' about Cleo, an' that pay roll an' all, why—"

"I'm beginnin' to see," said the trainmaster. "But, look here. If you'd figgered a hold-up why didn't you tell the dispatcher? It looks like that 'd been the thing to do. He couldda warned—"

"I thought of that," said Hug, "an' then I thought of this guy—this night operator collapsin' sudden. Now I knew that guy weighed a hundred an' eighty, an' he couldn't do much collapsin' without a fight. I figgered maybe he was in on the party, an' if the dispatcher called up there he could answer the wire. So I decided I better go myself. I knew Kistler couldn't be a long piece ahead of me, an' I figgered he'd have to be there if they was a holdup, because I knew agents don't give night operators the safe combinations. They was a cigarette stub burnin' on Kistler's desk, an' I thought if I'd hurry I might beat him to it. I admit that was a wild guess about that operator. Did he—"

"He's the gent your little lady friend put away with the poker," said the trainmaster. Cleo looked at the floor while Hug stared at her.

"Williams, gimme that good right hand of yours," said Trainmaster Ballard, reaching out and taking it. "Nobody but a crazy boomer'd do what you did. I've got to admit it takes a boomer to think fast like that. Cutter here has made a clean breast of how he put you to work against my orders that day, an' how he's kept you workin'; an' maybe I oughta fire you both, but I'm not. An' if it 'll help you get well any quicker, why, you got a good job to look forward to, an' I got a nice weddin' I'm waitin' for."

"You gonna hire any more boomers?" Hug suddenly asked.

"No more boomers," instinctively said the trainmaster with emphasis; then, as Hug made to withdraw his hand, Ballard added, "unless they're guys like you."

THE END.

"Let me at him!" shouted Jack Foster

The WH Brand

Jack Foster gallantly fights to save the "Woman Hater" Ranch from scheming foes and from its fair owner's folly

By F. R. BUCKLEY

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JACK FOSTER, a woman-hating young cow-puncher, is working on the WH Ranch in Texas, when the old owner, Matthias Holton, is murdered. With his dying breath Holton begs Jack to take care of his daughter, whom he had driven from home by his old-fashioned ways.

Jack and the foreman, old Jedediah Wilks, suspect lawyer James Carteret —who tried to get the ranch for his client, Holton's nephew, and who is connected with the oil-drilling syndicate which covets the WH property—and a discharged foreman, Bill Buldo, of the murder; but they can prove nothing and cannot get lazy Sheriff Ed Walker to investigate Buldo's alibi.

Alice Holton takes charge and tries to make Jack explain his indifference and almost rudeness to her. He tells how, during the war, he was jilted, and how his girl, marrying a profiteer, laughed at him. He saves Alice's life when her horse runs away toward a rocky gulch—and then infuriates her with his hurt, independent plea that she try to forget about it. Perversely she scorns his and Wilks's charges that the

This story began in the Argosy for November 9.

lawyer is implicated in the murder, and even encourages Carteret's attentions.

CHAPTER VII.

NIGHT ON THE RANCH.

ONE night when, passing to leeward of the veranda, Wilks had caught the murmur of voices and the whiff of a fine cigar, he burst forth to Jack Foster.

"The man that murdered her father!" the foreman snapped.

"You don't know that."

"I do!"

"Well, you can't prove it," snarled Jack in return.

It was noticeable, these days, that his temper was not of the best. Several times, during the weeks which had seen Mr. Carteret's visits increasing in number and duration, things in the bunk house had been perilously near fighting point; now, it appeared, the young man was including among his enemies the one person hitherto exempt. As for Jedediah Wilks, he was in a similar frame of mind.

"Can't prove it! But I will! Anyway, I'm tryin' to, which is more than she's doin'."

"How do you know? All this may be a scheme—"

Jedediah made a sound of contempt.

"Scheme my eye! Alice couldn't cook up a scheme to save her life. A baby could see through her. 'Sides, does she have to have him to dinner every night for that?"

"It isn't every night."

"You know darn well what I mean. She's ridin' with him, an' feedin' him, an' sittin' there in the smoke of his dog-gone twofer talkin' to him because she *likes* the hydrophobia skunk, that's why! He's got his hair oiled, an' his pants back fresh from the dry-cleaner's, and he says his o's like they was spelled 'ew,' an' she's fallin' in love with him."

Jack Foster—they were leaning over the railing of the corral—made a sudden sharp movement. His face, as he turned it in the half light of the coming night, looked haggard.

"You lie, Wilks!"

"I lie, do I? Lemme tell you, it's all the talk in Hurst City, how the WH is goin' into the Syndicate by marriage. There was a guy down there in the store offerin' two to one on it till I flattened his nose. Everybody knows it except you, an' you call me a liar. When it's all your fault!"

"What do you mean, it's all my fault?"

Torrents of words seemed to surge behind Jedediah Wilks's mustache. He made choking noises and moved his hands. Finally, his lined old face convulsed with rage, he snatched off his sombrero and, with a movement of ineffable contempt, hurled it into the dust at Foster's feet.

"Aw, you sickening fool!" he half shouted, and marched away.

JACK FOSTER did not attempt to formulate to himself any explanation of his ex-friend's words. He was, in certain essential branches of knowledge, temporarily inferior, as has been shown, to such lower forms of life as blackbirds; but he knew better than that.

Indeed, he refused utterly even to think about Wilks's remarks; much less would he contemplate Alice Holton and the man who was now sitting next to her on that long cane settee on the porch.

When such thoughts, rising in the turmoil of his mind, threatened to take

his withheld attention by force, he even resorted to that most desperate expedient of a cowboy—he walked.

He walked clumsily, partly because his boots were riding boots, with heels higher than those worn by even the most fashionable ladies. But he walked fast; and, by half past eleven, he had walked far. He had been up past the water tower, around the barns, over to Two-Mile Copse, and across the stream from whose waters he had saved Alice Holton. Now he was returning, sufficiently clear in mind to have noticed that his boots were hurting, and to have taken them off.

He was within fifty yards of the bunk house, now dark like the house itself, when, dim above the soft sound of grass under his stockinged feet, he heard voices.

He stopped, put down his boots, drew a deep breath, and listened. He could make out disjointed words.

"What . . . for it?"

Crouching, moving as silently and as rapidly as a panther, his mind now clear and cold as crystal, Foster moved in the direction of that voice.

Some one—two men, in fact—were standing under the live oak thirty yards behind the bunk house. No, three men; for, as Jack halted, another voice, low but clear in the dead silence of the night, said: "Yeah, what are we gonna do for it?"

The third replied: "Nothing much. In fact, nothing. Nothing, is just what you're being paid to do. Get me?"

It was Carteret speaking.

"No," said the man who had spoken first.

"Well, it's simple enough. All I want you to do is to lie down on the job. You've got a woman boss, haven't you? Well, take it easy. She can't drive you."

"Jed Wilks can."

"He may not," came the lawyer's tones suavely, "be driving anybody much longer."

Jack's backbone chilled at the accent of his words. Murder was implicit in them—murder as cool and unscrupulous as the murder of Matthias Holton.

"What's the idea?"

"That's no business of yours," said Carteret coldly. "You'd sooner have a man boss than a woman, wouldn't you? Well, if you do as I tell you, you will most likely have one."

"That depends on who he is," said the second speaker.

Carteret seemed to hesitate. There was a silence, through which came the faint, unmistakable sound of new bank notes passed from hand to groping hand.

"Well, so long as he's a man," came the lawyer's voice, "who fixes you up like that, he'll be satisfactory, won't he?"

IT was, no doubt, an amusing thing for him to say; it brought—after some seconds devoted to heavy contemplation of just what he might mean by it—appreciative chuckles from the two listeners of whom Mr. Carteret was aware.

That he should not have been aware of the presence of a third—and that this third person should be the one person in the audience to be flung by such a mild joke into a state of blind, berserker fury—was, to say the least of it, unfortunate.

Especially unfortunate for the gentleman carried on the WH roll as Bill Stevens. As, chuckling, Stevens was inserting a twenty-dollar bill into his belt, he received on the nose a right swing intended in the darkness for

Mr. Carteret's jaw-point, and fell perfectly stunned to the grass.

"What—" came the lawyer's voice.

He should not have spoken until he had gained complete possession of the revolver on which, in his jacket pocket, his hand had rested during the whole conversation. As it was, his ejaculation enabled Jack Foster to correct his sense of direction.

Just as a light—a lamp in the hands of some one wakened by the thud of the first blow—blazed at the bunk house window, Mr. Carteret realized that by speaking so soon, while yet the gun was caught in the lining of the pocket, he had put himself, one-handed, at the mercy of a man with two hands. One of these closed about his wrist and, with a wrench, tore the gun free from the cloth; the other snatched it from his grip and, with a jerking motion that produced incredible power, flung it into his face.

It was a heavy gun, and knobby, and Mr. Carteret was not accustomed to pain. He gave a yell of agony, flung hands to his face, and stood blindly awaiting the blow that should knock him unconscious.

That he did not receive it—Jack's arm was already drawn backward and down for the uppercut—was due to no merit of his own.

Jimmie Jacobs, the second traitor to the WH, was Carteret's rescuer. He caught Foster's arm in the hook of his own; followed up this good deed with a rabbit punch to the back of the neck, and then, with Jack's right elbow still in his grip, reached upward with his left hand for a grab at his enemy's face.

An excellent idea—conceived, however, without sufficient thought of the weakness of the human ribs. Something appallingly hard hit Jacobs in his—once, twice, and again; he gasped and, for a moment, allowed his right arm to relax in its hook grip of Jack Foster's.

Instantly that d e a d l y weapon crushed itself free; and the next moment, while Jack's left continued its pounding at the ribs, that right fist was whistling through the air on a bee-line for the jaw.

Jacobs's heels flew up, his head shot backward; and his mind, for the next half hour, floated free in the Elysian fields.

"Now, you!"

Jack Foster was addressing Carteret, but the lawyer was no longer before him—at least, not immediately so. A man in extreme *deshabille,* to wit one shirt, was holding the lamp; it was Jedediah Wilks. There were others with him, just as sketchily dressed. Two of them were taking Carteret by the elbows—he would not relinquish his grip of his face—and leading him toward the ranch house.

"LET me get at him!" cried Jack Foster, and felt hands seize him likewise by the arms—numerous strong hands, which, even in his fury, he could not shake off. He tried to, and dragged five men down with him in a writhing heap on top of the unfortunate Bill Stevens.

"Wilks!" Jack gasped from the mêlée. "Help me up! He—he was bribin'— Let me get up, you dogs, you!"

"Well, you knew he was, dincha?" snapped old Jed. "He bribed more'n them, an' you knew it."

"That's a lie!" said one of the men on top of Jack.

Lamp still in his left hand, Jed Wilks hit that man scientifically with his right.

"The rest of you—let him up," he commanded; and was obeyed with precipitation.

Wilks was about to speak to Foster, when something distracted his attention. He raised his lamp, stared into the circle of its light, and with a smothered exclamation blew it out.

"I'm goin' back to the bunk house," he said agitatedly. "Here comes Miss Alice, an' I ain't dressed. Oh, jiminy!" His bare feet pattered away.

Foster, standing in the midst of the group formed by the men who had prevented his further attack on Carteret, heard footsteps approaching. A flash light snapped on. Facing him, scarcely a yard away, was Alice Holton; seen this close for the first time in—how many days? She was wearing a boudoir gown of green silk; her feet, in green satin mules, were bare.

Behind her Mr. Carteret babbled: "As I say, I was just asking these men to help me find my horse—he'd broken his rope and wandered—"

"What's this?" demanded the girl of Jack Foster.

She was looking at him with an intensity of expression which startled the man who towered above her. In that instant, he became conscious of the scratch that marked his face—where Jacobs had tried for that neck-breaking grip; and of the blood which was trickling in a thin stream from his knuckles.

Before her daintiness he felt huge and dirty and confused. Words were slow in coming to him; and Alice Holton did not wait for them.

"I'll tell you," she said. "Ever since you've been here, you've been a source of trouble. It's been impossible to get a civil word out of you. This outrage is too much—an assault on a guest of mine. I'm grateful to you for saving my life; I'm willing to do anything I can for you; you know why I haven't done anthing up to now. But I can't have this kind of thing. And I won't! Do you understand that?"

"Are you aware," said Jack Foster slowly, in a voice that was deeper than usual, "what this man was doin', miss, when I came across him?"

"No, and I don't care. You'll apologize to him, and to me—"

"I won't!"

The girl's face was deathly pale, save for two spots of high color on her cheeks. Behind her, Carteret thought it a good time to display two missing teeth in a smile.

"But I'll tell you what I will do," said Jack Foster, starting forward. "I'll take that grinning dog and—"

The hands were upon him again. Jedediah Wilks, in a decorous shirt and trousers, was back with his lamp. In its light Alice Holton flung her ultimatum into the face of her champion.

"Then you can leave this ranch tomorrow!" she cried furiously. "You are discharged!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HERMIT GUARDIAN.

IT is not easy nowadays, with the prices of real estate what they are, actually to be monarch of all one surveys; but almost any one, particularly including beggars, can look the part. All one needs is a perch high above the surrounding plain, a brown cigarette, and a contented expression; and Jack Foster had all three. With the month's salary which, gravely refusing to wait until morning and receive it from Alice Holton, he had drawn from Jed Wilks on the night of his departure from the WH, Foster

had visited Hurst City. His destination was a store which, with about ten square yards of floor space, claimed to be Uncle Sam's main outlet for stores no longer needed by the armed forces.

Here, for the modest sum of four dollars and ninety-eight cents, Jack had purchased a pup-tent, a mosquito-bar, as used, according to the salesman, in the Philippine Islands; a frying pan, a knife and fork, and a tin box to hold bacon.

Across the street at the general store he had purchased one box of .45 caliber No-Stayn cartridges; bacon to go in the box; coffee for the coffeepot which bobbed merrily at his horse's withers; flour, condensed milk, dried beef, and the usual sundries—including, unusually enough, a half-gallon jar of pickled onions.

With these delicacies and conveniences, he had taken his way in a high and abstracted manner toward a knoll overlooking the WH; which post, after two days, he had found too hot to be borne.

By steps—about forty-eight hours to each—he had moved upward and out of the shimmering furnace of the plain until for the last three days past he had been eating his bacon and flapjacks, drinking his coffee, and toying with the pickled onions, on a crag of the hills which encircled Alice Holton's ranch to the north.

In all respects this was an eligible central situation. For use during those hours of the day when the sun beat on the flat rock which sustained Jack Foster's cooking utensils there was a cave in the crag behind. A remarkably convenient cave it was, too, equipped not only with two entrances which insured a constant circulation of air, but also with a trickling spring which, while still further lowering the temperature, also supplied water for domestic purposes.

By night the pup-tent could be rigged on a strip of short, springy grass near the moraine which formed a breastwork between the trail and Foster's retreat; and—what was most important to the occupant—the place afforded at all times an excellent view of the WH Ranch.

Having finished the more solid section of his breakfast, Jack Foster, cigarette in one hand and coffeecup in the other, was in fact staring down reflectively at the ranch, when behind him, and at a point considerably nearer than the trail, he heard a cracked voice indulging in most reprehensible profanity.

"I'm leadin' you, ain't I?" demanded Jedediah Wilks invisibly. "Want me to carry you, you thingummy bobbed *et cetera* blanked mule, you! Hi, John! Johnny Foster!"

THE young man rose swiftly and set down his cup.

The voice repeated its call, with much the intonation of a calf which, separated from its mother, finds itself tangled in barbed wire.

"Oh, Jack! I know you're somewhere around here, dod gast an'—Stand *still,* you everlastingly thunderbolted cross between a burro an' a polecat! Johnny!"

Grinning, Foster walked quickly and silently over the grass patch toward the moraine. Three minutes later, having indicated, amid language of a really high order, the track leading between the bowlders of the moraine, he was sitting by his fireplace with Jedediah Wilks; while that gentleman's much abused pony whickered its resentment to Jack's own horse in the cave.

"Coffee?" asked Jack hospitably.

"Nah. Air. Phoo!"

Wilks helped himself to that commodity in generous lungfuls. Also, he fanned himself with a violently red and yellow bandanna, wiped his face with the same, and stuck the soaked result into his breast pocket.

"Well?" he demanded at last.

Jack Foster smiled at him.

"Well?" he demanded in turn. "What's the matter, Jed? Not sore at me again, are you?"

"I'm not sore at you again," said the old man. "I'm still sore at you. An' I may say that climbin' Alps with the thermometer at a hundred an' ninety in the ice box ain't calculated to make me feel any better about things. What do you figure you're playin' at?"

Puffing his cigarette lazily, Foster made a gesture with his right arm. The gesture included the WH Ranch and all that lay therein; and Wilks understood it perfectly.

"Yeah," he said with scorn, "an' a fine job you're makin' of it. What good d'you think you're doin' up here, miles from everythin'?"

"I'm not up here all the time," said his companion mildly. "I kind of sit here during the days, watchin' to see whether any more citizens go around poisonin' wells or the like of that; but at night I'm a long way from here—an' a good deal nearer to you than you suppose, old man. Did you ever know that you've got a barytone snore? I heard it night before last."

Wilks wriggled.

"An' what good do you figure that does?"

"The snore? Oh, you mean my bein' around. Well, I tell you. Seemed to me that with syndicates around seekin' whom they might devour, an' especially lawyers like Mr. Carteret lookin' after whom they can marry to save themselves trouble, it wouldn't be such a bad idea for *somebody* to be awake around there, twenty-four hours out of the twenty-four. You're O. K. in the daytime, but judgin' by the way you can play 'Tea for Two' on your nose—"

"Nemmin' about that," said Wilks, rolling an angry eye.

"ALL right. Then tell me somethin'. Am I wrong, or hasn't Mr. Carteret been as plentiful around the ranch these last few days? Seems to me I haven't had the pleasure of feastin' my eyes on his horse for nigh a week."

"He's—" began Jedediah, and then stopped. His indignation at being forced to ride five stony miles in the sun had not been soothed by references to his snoring. "But you've got a fine right to be askin' me questions, I'll say. You that promised her pa you'd stick around, an' then beat it eight hours before she thought you would."

"I am stickin' around," said Jack Foster tranquilly. "Besides, I was fired."

"You were fired as of the next mornin'!" snapped the foreman. "Ain't you got any sense at all? But no, you haven't. I seen that some time ago. Still, you might have known that. The way she bawled me out—yeah, an' I'll bet she cried, too, an' that was why I had to do all the bargainin' with that silo salesman."

"What?"

"Don't you know any better," demanded Wilks, "than to take a woman at her word when she tells you to clear out? You settin' up to know women well enough to hate 'em, an' not even aware that that's just their way of sayin' don't for Pete's sake leave me, but

let's have a pardon-beggin' party an' be better friends than ever? You make me sick."

Jack Foster's cigarette, squeezed by fingers suddenly grown nervous, came unstuck. The young man looked at it in a puzzled way for some seconds, and dropped it into his coffee.

"Are you crazy?" he inquired, turning upon Wilks eyes that were peculiarly vague.

"No, I ain't! Not that I shan't be, soon. There's a pretty mess brewin', an' here's you up in the hills livin' like"—Mr. Wilks paused for a simile—"like some kind of a Russian sultan, an' everythin' landin' on me, when the whole darn business is your fault! No, you needn't pull any mouths to ask me what I mean. You know what I mean, or if you don't you oughta get your head examined. You know she's in love with you, an' I wouldn't bet a Confederate nickel that you ain't in love with her, an' here you go makin' her bring this Carteret around."

"*I*—makin' her?"

"Yeah. You know," said Wilks, wagging the inevitable finger, "why she was havin' him around to dinner, an' goin' for rides with him, an' sittin' on the porch with him, all the time knowin' what kind of a skunk he was. It wasn't to make him confess murderin' her pa neither. You know why she made you take his horse—"

Foster, from an extraordinary pallor, suddenly developed a furious flush.

"She did not!" he growled.

"No," said Wilks, regarding him with interest. "No more she did. That would ha' been overbiddin' her hand. Well, anyhow, buddy, you ain't such a fool as you act, so we'll say no more about that."

"You mean to say you think—"

"I said," remarked Wilks, raising his hand pontifically, "that we'd say no more about that. What I'm here to tell you is that, strictly owin' to you, things down there are in a good deal worse shape than they would ha' been if you'd—talked about such matters earlier."

FOSTER seemed strangely breathless, and strangely uninterested in Jedediah's later remarks. He appeared eager to return to a discussion of his own foolishness.

"You mean that she—"

"I don't," said Wilks, eying his victim with malicious satisfaction, "mean anythin' about her at all. I'm not, at the present moment, discussin' any lady, except accidentally. What I'm here to tell you is that two days after you flew the coop, Mr. Carteret asked Miss Alice to marry him—an' if you squeeze that mug any harder it 'll bust all up."

"Well?" asked Jack Foster, after a pause.

"Well," said Wilks, "you not bein' on patrol duty that night, so far as I could make out, or if you were, not bein' where you was needed; an' I not bein' in my berth, which I had well earned, havin' rode about forty miles that day lookin' for you, an' not snorin' either 'Buffalo Gals' or 'Everythin' is Hotsy-Totsy Now,' which it isn't—I kind of took the liberty of bein' outside the livin' room windows when the gentleman popped the question. 'Alice,' says he—"

"I don't want to hear what he said," snarled Jack. "What did she say?"

"You're missin' a lot," said Wilks regretfully. "He was real cute. To hear him talkin' about noble women an' unworthy men that weren't so unworthy at that if you came right down to it, an' about ridin' off into the sun-

set together—honest, it almost brought rocks to my hands. It was beautiful."

"Is she goin' to marry him?"

"Well, no," said Mr. Wilks. "Not what you'd call to any great extent. I dunno whether it was the fact of his havin' them teeth missin', or whether she kind of objected to his other activities—you know, tryin' to get the ranch away from her. Anyhow, from what she said I gathered that she wasn't considerin' becomin' Mrs. C. There was somethin' about the way she called him a low-down, woman-robbin', murderin' Judas Iscariot that kind of made me think she didn't really like him. Can I have a cigarette?"

"Did she," asked Jack Foster harshly, "did she—say anything about me?"

"Seems I remember she said she wished you'd killed him," observed the foreman, rolling busily. "Oh, an' at the end she more or less burst into tears an' said she'd driven away her only friend, which was kind of hard on my tenderest feelin's. But you needn't look broody that way. Listen, bud. Here's what he said. You listenin'? Well, you don't look it. When she was through with him, he told her a few things. One of them was that she'd be sorry for this. For another—bein' a jasper that can't keep his mouth shut when he's angry—he said that he was goin' to show her whether she could waste his time an' make a monkey outa him."

"What did he mean by that?" Jack demanded.

"YOU needn't roar that-away. He ain't here. Why, he meant that he'd been lettin' up on the strong-arm stuff because she'd kidded him he might get the ranch by marriage, an' that now he saw he couldn't, he was goin' to go back to the old methods an' make up for lost time. But listen. That ain't the worst of it."

"No?"

"Though occasionally catchin' a bit of sleep myself," said Wilks, "with or without music, I've been keepin' the best eye possible on things. I've posted sentries."

"I saw them."

"Not that they're any good, havin' been bought," said Wilks, "but still—Well, it's over a week now since Carteret got the raspberry, an'—nothin's happened."

"You should worry about that!"

"You're right I should," said Jedediah somberly. "Listen, Jack. I know that guy. I understand men with eyes set that-away. If he's layin' off, it ain't for mercy's sake; nor it ain't to cover his tracks. Boy, I tell you that bird's steppin' back for a long jump; an' when he makes it, it 'll be with the idea of landin' on our necks with spiked shoes. Now, you listen to me. I dunno when the storm's goin' to break, but when it does, it 'll be a hell-bender."

"What d'you think he'll do? Drive off the cattle?"

"Nah. Nor he won't poison the water again. For one thing, I've kind of convinced all hands that the guy as loses beeves from his section, or lets anybody drop gubbins in the stream, will need all his bribe money for a coffin; an' for another thing, those stunts ain't bad enough. He wants the ranch just as much as he ever did, an' he's all set to get it. But there's somethin' else on his mind now. 'Course, a woman-hater like you wouldn't have noticed it, but our Mr. Carteret kind of fancies himself with the ladies. I could tell you a few tales that I've picked up in Hurst City lately."

"Well?"

"Well," said Wilks, blowing smoke through his nose, "if you could ha' heard what Miss Alice told him while rejectin' a good man's love, you'd realize that he's had a nasty kick in the pride. Now, when you've lived as long as I have, you'll get to know that while a jasper can act right mean on account of wantin' somethin' that ain't his, what 'll make him bust all the ten commandments with the worst knobs on, is just that—havin' his pride kicked."

Suddenly, Jack Foster was on his feet.

"Damn your philosophizing!" he roared. "Get to the point. Is she in danger?"

"Not so long as I'm around alive," said Jedediah gravely, "but—I ain't immortal. Supposin' anythin' happened to me, I'd say yes; unless somebody equal was there to take my place. You, for instance."

"Did she—did she send you for me?"

JEDEDIAH WILKS contemplated the end of his cigarette.

"Er—no," he said, "not exactly. Y' see, you've kind of hurt her feelin's all along—guess that's why she likes you so much, maybe; an' your breezin' off like that kind of put the lid on it."

"There was no reason why I shouldn't!"

The foreman arched his eyebrows.

"Oh, all right. If you want to kid yourself about yourself, go ahead. But what I'm sayin' is—"

"What did she say about me?"

Wilks hesitated.

"Go on! She said something!"

"Well, she did kind of say that she wouldn't have you around on a bet until such time as you'd begged her pardon, an'—"

"Begged her pardon? What for?"

"I dunno," said Wilks. "She's a woman. Oh, an' she likewise said that if I got you back, she'd fire me, too."

"She must be mad."

"She's a woman, I tell you," said the foreman placidly, "an' she knows I wouldn't go. Any more than you've gone; an' not bein' in love with her, I wouldn't go even as far as this!"

"I am not in love with her!"

"Have it your own way," said Wilks patiently. "I guess prob'ly it's the hot weather affectin' you, then. Anyhow, there's one thing you can't get over, even if you'd served in fifty Great Wars, an' been thrown down by the Queen of Sheba. You made a promise to her pa."

"Yes, and I'm keeping it as well as she'll let me! I've had enough of women, I tell you. I'm not goin' to bow myself down before any of 'em any more. You talk like an old idiot. I'll do what I can for her, same as I said I would; but if you think I'm goin' to be played with— Why can't they act decently, any of them—like friends—the way men do?"

"Why, they're women," said Jedediah Wilks for the third time. His old eyes seemed to have softened during his diatribe, as much as Jack Foster's had grown harder. Jedediah got stiffly to his feet.

"Don't be a fool, buddy," he said gently. "I lost my wife and kids in a railway smash. But I told you that before. I was young then. Don't be a fool."

He shook himself.

"Now," he observed, "havin' told you all there is about the matter, I leave it to you, and will forthwith fork my nag an' get back to the burnin' desert in time for chuck. Nice cool place you have here. Good place to think in.

Think over what I've been sayin'. G'by."

WITH a scowl meant to convince himself that the upshot of his thoughts was already decided, Jack Foster obeyed this suggestion. As the sun, from its meridian height, sank imperceptibly toward the west, he went over, in his mind, all such elements of the case as might justify him in continuing in the course of action he had begun.

He hated women; he had, he told himself and proved it by bitter memories, a perfect right to do so. Look how calm, happy and contented he had been this very morning—his feelings during nine out of the other ten days since he had left the WH didn't matter, and he dismissed them—until old Wilks had found out his retreat.

Now what, by that visit, was responsible for his present misery of indecision? A woman! Always the fount of trouble; always puzzling a man, distracting him, betraying him, getting him killed as like as not; never, under any circumstances known to Jack Foster, doing him any good in any way whatsoever.

He reached this conclusion about one hour after sunset; and was, as a logical result of it, just about to saddle his horse, ride down to the WH, give Alice the apology she craved, and enroll himself in her territorial army once more. But glancing down at the dusk-gathering slope of the mountain, he observed the advance of a cavalcade.

Unaware of his presence on the rock so far above, five horsemen were climbing the hill at the best speed of their mounts. That they were in a hurry was proclaimed both by their speed, and by the fact that, avoiding the tortuous beginning of the trail, they were cutting across slippery grass to meet it higher up.

Narrowing his eyes in the growing darkness, Foster made out the cause of their haste.

They were coming from the direction of the WH; and, tightly held by an encircling arm on the crupper of the leader's horse, was the white-clad figure of a girl.

CHAPTER IX.

KIDNAPED.

STUNNED as he was for the moment—his hand, going toward the quite futile revolver at his belt, moved with the fumbling slowness of somnambulism—Jack had no uncertainty as to the meaning of the scene before him.

This was the catastrophe dimly foreseen by Jedediah; Carteret's trump lead—a combination foray for the winning of the ranch and the salving of his wounded self-esteem. A forced marriage?

The man must be mad—or surer of himself than most men would dare to be, under the Texas laws anent abduction; even with a sheriff like Ed Walker. But there was a third explanation: despair. Jack Foster, studying the matter with the half of his brain which was not busy with the cavalcade below, felt instinctively that this was the right one.

A crisis must have come in the affairs of Lawyer Carteret. That was what had made him hurry his vain courtship of Alice Holton; and what was causing him, repulsed in that direction, to risk, with this attempt, the grim justice of Southern courts, or the grimmer punishment decreed for his offense by the law of the open plains.

For an instant—his thoughts, passing through a mind that seemed dazed, yet came and went with extraordinary rapidity—Jack Foster thought of those Southerners who formed the working staff of the WH. Had they been bribed to the extent of countenancing this? He didn't believe it.

They had been willing to lie down on the job; not to inquire too closely, perhaps, into what was going on; but certainly they had not even thought of the possibility of any such villainy as this. They'd been out on the range, at their usual tasks; they would return to find Jed Wilks dead, most likely, and their girl-boss gone, leaving no clew. They'd look for her; bribed or not bribed, there was no doubt of that. They'd call in the sheriff. But even if the fugitives went no farther than this, it would take days to search the hills; and in even twenty-four hours, what might not happen?

This was a one-man job; and the one man for it was Jack Foster. The realization came to him like a dash of cold water in the face; his mind, ceasing suddenly to speculate, focused sharply on realities.

What was he to do?

Unconscious of his presence above them, the riders were passing out of sight into a hillside thicket. They were making for the trail; Jack knew, even the point at which they would emerge upon it. They were armed, as long gleams of reflected sunset from their saddles attested, with rifles. For one man, armed with one revolver to attack them would be suicide pure and simple. Yet Jack's fingers clenched and his eyes glowed as he thought of himself, at whatever risk, shooting down those dogs as they came up the hillside toward him. Any other plan must depend on the enemy's movements. For the present, there was nothing to do but wait, and watch. It was high time to be getting on the job.

Instinctively, though the cavalcade would hit the trail scarce two hundred yards away, Jack moved toward his horse; and stopped. That would be absurd, of course; hoof-beats among the loose stones would be heard half a mile away in the still air; he would have to do his trailing afoot. Barefoot—as, accidentally, he had done at the WH that memorable night.

The prospect, on a hillside of rubble mixed with sage-brush roots, was one that might have appalled an Indian; but Jack Foster, unlacing his footgear and flinging it hastily toward the entrance of the cave, seemed to consider that not at all.

With a wry smile he reflected that, despite the hazard of his project, he wouldn't die with his boots on; then, silently, he disappeared between two bowlders of the moraine.

"WELL?"

It was ten minutes later. Bill Buldo was speaking, in snarling ignorance of the nearness of a man who, five yards from him in the sudden darkness of night, clutched a revolver butt and stared through the obscurity with eyes that burned.

"Well, what?"

Carteret himself. Out of breath—that meant, probably, that he was carrying the girl. He was not to be shot at, then, Jack realized; not until he should put her down. He was not on good terms with Buldo, judging by tones of voice. Foster's mind, enumerating these facts, stored them with the cold precision of a filing cabinet.

"Well, where we goin'?" asked Buldo in a dangerous growl. "I—"

"Didn't I tell you I knew a place?"

"Yeah. A lot I care what you say, you liar!"

"Shut up!" A third voice, unknown to the listener, broke in. "Say, we ain't in this business for our health. You two quit quarrelin' till we're safe. Where is this place, boss? It'd better be a good one. They'll be posses."

"We'll be through before they find us. Follow me."

Somebody in the party was timorous. He spoke.

"An' if they don't find us, what then? We'll have to go back to the county some time, an'—"

A hoarse laugh interrupted him, and the sound of a thump on the back.

"That's where you come in, Archie. Once a parson, always a parson. Wife can't testify against her husband, can she?"

"Yes, she can! And anyhow—"

"You shut your trap," came Carteret's voice, low and with the peculiar intonation of one who holds death in his hand. "After we're through, nobody'll feel much like facing a court and telling about it. You'll do what you're here for, or I'll blow your ribs in."

A nice man, thought Jack Foster, teeth set in his lower lip; kind of inclined to drop his Oxford accent, though, when excited. It would be a pleasure to—

Suddenly, the heart of the listener gave a leap—and seemed to freeze. Clear above the fretting of the horses' hoofs—they were on the trail now—came the sound of a sob; and weak words in the voice of Alice Holton.

"Oh, let me go. Take me home. I've done you no harm."

Carteret chuckled.

"Awake again, eh? Well, we aren't going to do you any harm, either—darling—as long as you're reasonable. Little girls must learn not to play fast and loose with greatums biggums men."

"You dog!"

"Because greatums biggums men," said Carteret with bitter mockery, "will carry ums honeybunch into great big high mountains, and ruin ums reputatiums until ums marries ums ickle boy."

"You'll—they'll hang you for this!"

"Funny," said Carteret, in his own voice, "I thought I was the lawyer. I ought to get five dollars for telling you they won't, but you can have the information free, since it's all in the family. Get behind me, you men. We cut straight up the bank."

THE beam of a flash light stabbed into the blackness; Jack Foster shrank behind his screen of shrubs, but the light was not turned his way. It pointed, instead, toward the summit of the mountain; and, after the horsemen had left the trail, crashing profanely upward through the undergrowth, he followed its lead.

Roots tripped him; sharp stones, seemingly poised edges up by some malicious sprite with plenty of time to spare, cut his feet; unseen branches of thorny bushes whipped viciously across his face. He was unconscious of them. It was only when, seeing the flash light halt, he came to a stop and leaned breathless against a tree, that he noticed the blood which was running into his eyes.

The raiders were at their hideaway. They were dismounting; Buldo, in a growl that made his meaning obvious though his words were indistinguishable at the distance, was protesting that he was not satisfied with it. Carteret's voice, sharp and menacing as it had been on the trail, answered him;

Archie put in his quavering remarks; and, as a fourth man came bullfrog-like to the work of reconciliation, the light of the electric torch disappeared. Not suddenly, as though it had been snapped off; gradually, leaving a reflected glow which proclaimed its bearer to be now below the surface of the ground.

Evidently it was one of those hollows, Jack Foster told himself, made by the falling of some mighty rock from the hillside. Common in the hills of Hurst County; often large enough to conceal half a dozen men and horses; so surrounded by brush, and so roofed in by overhanging tree-branches, as to be invisible either from above or below. It would be a long time before fat, sleepy Ed Walker found this place.

Carefully and silently, he crept forward. There was plenty of time now; and since the horses had ceased their clattering descent of the hollow's sides, he could no longer risk the crack of a dead branch underfoot. Catclaw, that most devilish of bushes, seized him by the shirt, and he sacrificed the garment rather than risk the noise of tearing denim.

A stone, resembling a needle rather than the usual razor-blade, drove cruelly into a wound already made; and, as he stifled a cry of agony, he felt another stream of blood start from his lower lip. He thought of the appearance of rescuing knights in story-books; grinned; and moved on.

He was at the edge of the depression. Lying on his stomach, head concealed by a low-growing bush, he looked down into an amphitheater perhaps fifteen yards across, and dimly lighted by Carteret's flash light. The lawyer, dismounted and with his arm still around Alice Holton—she was leaning against him as though scarcely more than conscious—stood in the center. Behind him, in the half shadow, the other men were hobbling their horses. All except Bill Buldo, who spread his black bulk in the glare of light, facing the leader.

"What have you got to say now?" Carteret snapped.

"What I said before!" said the ex-foreman of the WH. "We're gonna get life for this! I've known this hang-out for years, an' if I know it—"

"Others may not. Never mind. What do you propose to do about it?"

"I'm gonna quit!"

"ARE you?"

Twice before—on the trail, when Archie had made his protest, and again at the edge of the hollow—Jack Foster had heard the revolver in Carteret's voice. Now he saw it, a lean, serpentine gun pointing at Buldo's heart.

"I don't think so," said the lawyer. "And not because of this revolver, either. This is just to see you don't forget yourself here. I haven't any intention of shooting you—unless you try shooting me. No need, either. You know what I mean, don't you?"

"You'd—"

"You've said that before, Buldo, and I'm tired of hearing it. I'm a lawyer, and I may have some slight power in politics. I tell you once more that I shan't hang, and you will, unless you obey me. Obey me you shall, you swine. You've taken my money, and by the Lord I'll h a v e its worth; not in no-good wills and testaments, either."

The big man's shoulders sagged.

"It wasn't my fault."

"We've talked about that before, and I'm in no mood for talking now. Look here, Buldo; hand over your guns."

Slowly, dominated by the man before him, Bill Buldo unbuckled his belt.

"With one hand! I don't trust you, my beauty. There!"

Carteret slipped his own gun back into its shoulder holster; and, taking his arm from about Alice, he buckled Buldo's guns about his waist. Then he turned to the girl as she stood swaying, her hands to her head.

"Feeling better, eh?" he said.

"I'm—I'm cold."

She sounded like a child, waking in a strange place. Something seemed to take hold of Jack Foster's heart, giving it a painful squeeze.

"That's because you will wear pretty little thin summer dresses when stepping on a good man's heart," said Carteret gayly. "I'm sorry we can't build you a fire. It would be dangerous. But I have an idea. Why didn't I think of it before? Marry me, and we'll go right home again. Think how nice that would be!"

"Marry you?"

Still in that bewildered tone. Had the terror of that evening, Foster asked himself agonizedly, been too much for her mind?

She seemed never to have heard the proposition before.

"Yes, marry me. You seemed to be thinking of it at one time—before that handsome cow-puncher of yours beat me up. Is the idea so horrible to you now?"

The girl looked at him wide-eyed.

"Yes," she said simply; and Carteret grabbed her savagely by the arm.

"It is, eh? Well, we'll see how long it keeps on being."

"I'm—tired."

"So am I. You'll be tireder before you're through. How'd you like a day's riding to-morrow—and another the day after—and so on until—"

"I want to go to sleep."

CARTERET released her arm with a curse. From behind him, the quasi-clerical Archie spoke.

"I don't like this. I don't like this a bit. It isn't going the way—"

Swinging heavily on his heel, the lawyer struck him on the mouth.

"I've told you once before to shut up," he said. "I sha'n't tell you again! Go get a riata off a horse. You, George Miles, get that extra blanket. Spread it somewhere soft."

As the man addressed shambled away to prepare Alice Holton's bed for the night, Jack Foster racked his memory.

George Miles? George Miles? He had heard that name before. In a flash it came to him. Sheriff Ed Walker had mentioned it; Miles was an oil-driller, one of the witnesses to Bill Buldo's murder alibi. That hunch of Jedediah's seemed to be working out. Carteret had threatened Buldo with hanging.

"All ready!" said the man; and peering down, Jack saw Carteret busy fastening something about the waist of his prisoner. It was the riata, brought from a saddle by Archie, who now stood cringing near. They were going to tie the girl up for the night—like a dog!

"One blanket all you've got for her?" asked Bill Buldo.

Carteret turned on him.

"Owing to the necessity for traveling light," he said with deadly politeness, "it is. Have you any objection?"

"If she sleeps in that dress in this weather, she'll catch pneumonia."

"We have a doctor in our midst! Well?"

If she did die, Jack Foster realized the next heir would be the cousin—the cousin who had sold half interest in the WH to this man who clipped forth his words so delicately.

"Well," said Bill Buldo, "she can have my blankets. You'll need somebody to stand guard, won't you?"

"Are you volunteering?"

"Yeah. Any reason why I shouldn't?"

"None in the world. The only reasons I could give you," said the lawyer smoothly, "would be against taking advantage of our being sunk in sleep, to abscond; vanish; cut your lucky, or words to that effect. And those reasons I have already given you. I trust you will bear them in mind."

"I sha'n't run away," said Buldo; and in point of fact he did not. From nine o'clock, when the band of rascals rolled into their blankets, until midnight, when they were all sunk in indubitable slumber, he sat weaponless, but vigilant on the lip of the little valley, smoking cigarettes and staring faithfully about him.

And if, at the witching hour, he ceased to be as efficient a sentinel as Carteret might have desired, the fault was not his own. It was due entirely to his finding himself suddenly grasped from behind by two hands which closed his windpipe beyond the possible emission of even a squeak, and choked him into complete insensibility.

He opposed this process by the most violent kickings and clawings, but struck nothing; and no man can long continue violent exercise without air. Within three minutes of his first seizure Buldo was, in fact, lying gagged with his own shirt, his hands and feet shackled with other gents' furnishings. A pair of socks, for instance.

It was in trousers and undershirt that Jack Foster lowered himself, inch-at-a-time, into the hollow, and picked his way toward Alice Holton.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

The Flower That Talks

THE lotus, sacred flower of the Orient and associated with all Buddhist ritual and art, is the only flower in the world that actually makes a noise. With its tubers sunk in the deep mud of shallow ponds and lagoons, during the blossoming period the flower grows so rapidly that at the break of day a series of "pops" and "puffs" may be heard. The sap rises so rapidly and the blossom grows so swiftly that the noise is caused by the bursting open of the buds in the early dawn. Japanese and Chinese go to the parks before sunrise in order to hear the "speech of the lotus."

The lotus is found also in America up and down the Mississippi and in ponds and sloughs inland. And here, too, any one who wishes can go out at dawn to hear the popping of the buds. The lotus has been called the largest of flowers. It resembles a water lily, but the huge pads are sometimes two feet or more in diameter, rising high above the water on erect stems, and the flowers shoot above the pads. Some of the lotus blooms measure five inches across.

Wyman Sidney Smith.

The Running Mate

For some, football means flashing runs and glory; but for Roger Borden it meant plugging, interference, teamwork that made his rivals famous

By BENNETT LADD

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

FOR THE GOOD OF THE TEAM.

ROGER BORDEN was faced with a problem, for he had just been offered the position of house manager from the Gamma Delta Gammas, Midland's leading fraternity. The job entailed no menial duties, and would pay him vastly better than his position as assistant manager of Freshman Commons, which took more of his time than he could spare from football. On the other hand, there was Denny Kirkhardt.

When Roger had come to Midland as a lanky mountain youth, Denny Kirkhardt had been captain of the freshman football team; and Kirkhardt had missed no chances to make things uncomfortable for Borden, on and off the football field. Kirkhardt was a Gamma Delt, and Jim Hackett, president of that fraternity, was Kirkhardt's chum.

Still, Roger could see no way that Kirkhardt could be insulting in this arrangement, which was a perfectly straightforward business matter. All Roger's dealings would be with the Gamma Delt steward, his friend Buddy Whyte.

"I guess I'll accept, Buddy," Roger said slowly. "Thanks."

"That's fine. We certainly need some one to take hold of our muddled affairs. And you'll find it less bothersome with details than Commons."

Roger smiled grimly. "It'll certainly be easier than last year, say, breaking my back over the dishwashing machine."

"It's a marvel to me," Buddy said, "how you ever played after hoisting those trays twice a day."

"I guess I didn't do so much." There was a trace of bitterness in Roger's voice.

"Don't pull modesty. You're the best defensive and interference fullback Midland ever had."

A running mate, clearing the paths for others to gain yards and glory! "Well, I've got to get to practice," Roger excused himself.

COACH O'FERRALL was in a brutal humor. He spread his heavy legs wide apart, with one knotted brown hand on his hip and one pointing at the team. "I've never seen a rummier bunch of football players. How I'm ever expected to win games I don't understand. Little Clark College holds you to three touchdowns—and one of those a freak pass—in the second game of the season. You don't work together."

He centered his furious gaze on the members of the backfield. They shifted uneasily.

"Kirkhardt," he snapped at the captain, "you want to work more with the team; it's not a one-man show, you know. Hackett, you want to get into those plays closer. You won't spoil your mug. A quarterback's got something more to do than call signals. And you, Gonzales, don't stop when you're tackled. You start like a house afire—and the minute you're touched it's all over." He turned to Roger, looked at him dubiously for a second, and said: "Borden, you just keep on blocking."

Roger felt the blood rushing to his face. He wondered if the other men were aware of his humiliation. Drudge horse. The coach didn't expect him to gain; just to keep on working for the credit of the others. He drew his lips together in a grim line as the coach ordered them to active practice.

At the approach of midseason the scrubs were fighting hard to displace varsity men. Roger went down himself in cutting the end down. On the next play he plunged his strong shoulders through tackle and forced an opening. Then he opened a hole inside guard. Kirkhardt, Gonzales and Hackett followed him, broke loose for good gains.

The varsity pushed down field to the ten yard line, Kirkhardt spinning through the openings for spectacular runs. The scrubs held near their own goal. Hackett called Roger. He was always called when the defense was invulnerable. He charged into the line. There was no hole, and he fought savagely through the line. As he broke clear two backs hit him and he went down, fighting.

As Roger dropped back into his defensive position he looked toward the stands where a group of students were watching practice. There she was. Ann Grayson, the daughter of Midland's most popular professor and the toast of three graduating classes. For four years he had been warmed by her smile—from a distance.

He felt ashamed that she had seen him fail to gain. The others had failed, too, at that point, but she had seen Denny Kirkhardt sweeping around end. As always, she was surrounded with the wealthiest and most outstanding men in the university. For her he longed to do something to raise himself above collegiate obscurity and routine football. Grimes, of the scrubs, rushed around end on a fake kick and Roger threw him heavily. But they accepted that as all in a day's work for him.

Later Roger was called around end.

What should have been his interference broke over the incoming end and Roger had to circle. He cut in quickly as the halfback bore in. The fullback hit him head on and Roger struggled savagely. He was covered by tacklers before he broke clear. From the stands it must have looked like sorry running on his part, instead of indifferent interference by his teammates.

The long shadows of the Stadium were creeping across the field when O'Ferrall sent them to the showers. Roger flung himself wearily on the rubbing table for the deft fingers of Dan the trainer. The alcohol soothed his aching muscles, but not his mind.

His first year on the team he had found that his short gains were overshadowed by the halfbacks, the great Carstairs and the flashy Kirkhardt who were allowed to take wild running chances which would have been worth Roger's hard-won berth on the team.

Gradually Roger had been forced into interference, bearing the brunt of defense, while the high scorers rested. Carstairs had gone now, and Gonzales was no Carstairs; nor had Hackett improved at quarter. Yet Roger continued to do the leg work.

Roger used to think the other backs gave him scant protection because it was better for the team if they saved themselves. Now he knew it was because they belonged to the ruling fraternity and wanted the glory to remain there. Hackett, besides being president of Gamma Delt, was Kirkhardt's closest friend—they had entered Midland as roommates. Gonzales was of a different house, tied up with Gamma Delt by campus politics. He wasn't a modest, silent youth from an obscure mountain high school.

As for O'Ferrall, the coach had always had good running backs, and he was glad to have a dependable blocking and defensive back. He was a Gamma Delt, too; but Roger knew O'Ferrall worked for the good of the team—as he saw it.

ROGER rolled off the training table. He dressed slowly, dreading to begin his duties at the Gamma Delt house. Most houses had one of their own members as managers, but the snobbish Gamma Delts had no member who needed the money or who wanted to work.

Roger ate at the training table and walked down the beautiful Fraternity Row until he came to the handsomest house, set back from the drive. He had once hoped to belong to one of these houses. After he had made the team he had received plenty of belated bids, but his pride, and his belief that he was being rushed for his reputation rather than for real comradeship, prevented acceptance.

As he entered the brilliantly lighted house, he paused. There was gay laughter in the dining room and he thought he heard feminine voices. He remembered that Denny Kirkhardt had hurried through training table. Rather hesitantly, feeling himself an unwanted stranger here, Roger glanced in for Buddy Whyte.

The table was filled with elegantly dressed students and half a dozen girls were seated among them. Gamma Delta Gamma, the cream of Midland society. Then he found himself flushing as he looked into the dancing eyes of Ann Grayson. What a lovely imp of a girl she was, and how far away she seemed, being entertained by the men employing him!

Buddy saw him and arose. "Hello, Rog," he cried.

Other men spoke briefly, with more

or less cordiality. Denny Kirkhardt called out: "Make some speech, Buddy; let our guests know that Gamma Delt is being honored with a new manager, one of Midland's eminent gridiron warriors."

Buddy laughed uneasily. "We'll make speeches after he straightens out the books."

Roger was looking at Ann. She was not laughing. He felt, as he had before, a light in her eyes, less casually gay than usual.

He mumbled some words and followed the steward upstairs. He listened to the outline of duties with half an ear. He was still seeing the dusky eyes of Ann as they faded from gayety into something deeper in meeting his glance.

Roger thought of her next afternoon as he plunged into scrub defenses, clearing openings for the other varsity backs. As he tore into runners and dropped them short, he was thinking of the way her slender young body had felt on the few occasions he danced with her. He wondered what she would say if he were a great and flashing runner; and he fought desperately to advance the ball more than a few yards.

That evening he walked past the busts of Midland's founders on the famous arch, past the celebrated square of the dormitories in which was his room, through the traditional oaks, to the rear of the campus where Professor Grayson's bungalow reposed.

Ann herself appeared at the door. She literally took his breath.

"Roger! I'm awfully glad to see you."

He thought she was being polite. He made a tentative advance: "You go to the dances, don't you?"

"All of them."

"You're going Saturday night?"

"I hope to." She smiled softly.

Here was his opening; why didn't he ask her? An expensive, low roadster drove up with a screeching of brakes. The door slammed and a second later Denny Kirkhardt bounded on the porch.

"What d'you say, kid? Hello, Borden." He turned back to Ann, grasping her hand. "We just discovered that it's okay to dance until one o'clock Saturday night, and I've rushed over to tell you I'm dragging you."

Ann looked questioningly at Roger. He wet his lips. It seemed that he couldn't speak. Besides, it might embarrass Ann if he had been mistaken about her attitude toward his half-invitation.

"I'm your victim," she said at last to Kirkhardt with an assumption of lightness.

PROFESSOR GRAYSON was an inveterate football fan. He confided his interest to Paul Morley, student sports writer of the Midland *Guardian*, who suggested he watch the Midland-Tech game from the press box.

"This view certainly reveals all the details," said the professor.

"Umm." Paul was concentrating on his typewriter.

The professional sports writers glanced at the professor and continued clicking out copy. "Sixty thousand spectators thronged the stands at the annual game of the ancient rivals."

The professor could see the play of each man as the teams merged for the opening kick-off.

Tech played a careful, waiting game. Hackett opened Midland's strong offensive. Roger knew Tech was holding reserves to use men so unsparingly on defense. Plunging into the line was

like going into a threshing machine and each defensive back struck as though it was his last act. Kirkhardt had to fight to make short gains and the other backs made hardly any advance.

Roger took the ball around end. His interference divided—over the same end Roger had been taking out regularly. Roger circled and with a desperate sprint cleared his tackle. He had to give ground and a tackle who had seeped through nailed him for no gain.

"Nice run," Kirkhardt jeered. "You made almost twenty yards across field."

"You made almost as much getting out of the end's way."

Late in the second period the Tech quarterback ran a punt to midfield and they opened their long delayed offensive. Short line jabs drew the Midland backs in. Unexpectedly a long pass floated through the air. The professor saw a blue-jerseyed figure leap high to bat it down.

"Borden. Right?" a reporter said.

"Didn't you see his No. 7?" snapped another.

Morley of the student paper said: "Kirkhardt would've snagged it."

"The point is, Kirkhardt wasn't there—and Borden was," one of the city sports writers flung casually at the "cub."

The professor looked keenly at Morley. "You're a Gamma Delta Gamma, aren't you?"

"Why, yes, sir," the student reporter said in surprise.

Hmm, thought Grayson, the best in all lines. They were the strongest factor in the campus politics which he hated so violently. It had been one of his ambitions to show Ann, raised as she was in the university, that appearances were deceptive. She was too close to things to understand them fully.

His attention was attracted to the field by a roar below him. A Tech forward passer was retreating with ball poised on one hand. A blue No. 7 was rushing in on him. Borden leaped and the passer fell heavily on his back, the ball rolling from his hand.

A charging Midland linesman swooped it up and started toward his goal. The professor saw Borden rise and cut down the first pursuer. The linesman reached midfield before he was hauled in.

In successive dashes Kirkhardt tore down the field, with the cheers of the crowd. Professor Grayson noticed in surprise that he was always preceded by a No. 7 jersey, who opened wide gaps and cut down men like wheat. The professor didn't need to see the number now; no one could miss that lithe figure with the broad sloping shoulders and the powerful movements.

Borden took the ball once. He fought through a narrow opening. He tore off restraining hands as he plunged forward, fighting at every step, before the backs weighed him down.

On the two-yard line the play started off end. Borden cut in over tackle and opened a wide hole. Kirkhardt galloped straight to it on the fake play and went through for the touchdown.

"Kirkhardt! Kirkhardt!" shrieked the stands below the professor.

ON the kick-off at the second half Ann was watching Roger. There was a suppleness in his powerful figure that held the eye. Kirkhardt had received and she watched Roger speed ahead. He knocked the bulky center off his feet and plunged into a tackle and cut him down. Roger staggered clear and sprang like a panther into a heavy guard, going down with him.

The stands were rising to their feet, yelling madly, and she leaped up and saw Kirkhardt twirl inward from the sideline, evading a tackler. He cut across diagonally. A figure rose beside him and rushed along with him. It looked like Roger. The figure cleared the path, going down finally. Kirkhardt then broke into the open. So that was a running mate.

At midfield the waiting safety man brought Kirkhardt down.

"Kirkhardt!" echoed the stands.

Near the goal all assaults failed. Roger took the ball around end. The rangy end chased him across the field. Roger cut in quickly, evading him. A tackle swooped on him from behind. He forced himself free by sheer strength and lunged forward. Two defensive backs were on him. He whirled, and fell, still fighting. He had lost a yard and the chances for scoring were over.

In the press box an out-of-town reporter said: "They never give Borden protection."

On the Midland bench O'Ferrall said to his backfield coach: "The men don't seem to work well with Borden carrying the ball."

The backfield coach said nothing. He liked his job and he knew that O'Ferrall liked Kirkhardt, thought him a flawless back.

After the game Roger went to the Gamma Delt house to straighten up his accounts. He had a lot of studying to do Sunday and he wanted to be free of work. He thought he might go to the dance afterward; he might see Ann.

He was finishing the last sheets when the music started in the fraternity house and he realized they must be having a dance of their own. Occasionally a feminine laugh reached him. Buddy Whyte came in and said: "Don't you want to come down?"

"No, thanks."

"Ann Grayson is there."

Roger started. How did Buddy know about that?

"Oh, I've known for a long time you've been keen for Ann. If you want to keep it a secret you shouldn't look at her that way."

Roger tried to laugh. "Don't be foolish."

"Foolish? Know what a girl said to me at the last dance? 'I'd give up my chances for a rich marriage if a man looked at me the way that dark, handsome boy looks at Ann Grayson. There's a man to watch, in love or hate.'"

"Is the girl here?" Roger tried to be light.

"No, but Ann is."

"Oh, I might come down, thanks."

He did want to go, but he would give no one, least of all Denny Kirkhardt, a chance to say he was intruding. He decided to slip down on the veranda and watch her.

HE went down the back stairs, out through the kitchen, and around the house. As he thought, the veranda was deserted this early. There she was! If only he were dancing with her instead of Denny Kirkhardt. The whole group of Tuxedoed men made him feel very lonely. Then the orchestra broke in "The Tiger Marches":

"From the banks of old Midland's shore
Resounds that victory cry,
The Tiger marches on once more:
Our men will win or die."

A lump formed in his throat and he turned away. He walked over to the

porch railing, looked across at the university buildings crouched in massed shadows on the campus. A gentle October breeze stirred the oaks. He loved the school. Although it was a society college, ruled by cliques, he loved it.

He started on hearing voices near him.

Denny Kirkhardt, with Ann Grayson on his arm, was pausing at the top of the steps.

"Who's our mountaineer marvel planning to waylay out here?" Kirkhardt wise-cracked.

Roger's jaw formed in a hard line, his lips compressed grimly. His mountain people never quarreled in the presence of ladies, unless under justifiable cause. Roger wondered if he would be justified in striking that heavy jaw.

"Congratulations, Roger," Ann cried. "You played a splendid game. I heard all about it from father. He saw it from the press box and he saw *everything*."

"Thank you, Ann." He looked at her closely, wondering what she meant.

Kirkhardt interrupted:

"Borden, better see that a swell feed is prepared after the dance. We're throwing a big supper to-night."

"My business is conducted with the steward."

"Well, you needn't get high hat about it," Kirkhardt said belligerently.

"And you needn't get officious. When I want any advice from you I'll ask for it."

"Yeah? Well, if you get too upstage I'll give you something else that you're not asking for."

"All right. I'm asking for it right now." Roger's tone was low and cold.

Kirkhardt shrugged, and pulled a flask from the inside coat pocket of his dinner jacket. Roger caught a whiff of a breath mingling whisky and mints. Roger kept his eyes on the hand holding the flask. He never knew what Kirkhardt intended doing. At that moment a quick step was heard and Professor Lawson, one of the athletic board, appeared on the side of Kirkhardt. Unnoticed, he had turned in from the Row.

Like a flash Roger snatched the flask, which Kirkhardt was holding in the hand on the far side of the professor.

"Mr. Kirkhardt," snapped the professor, "did I see a flask in your hand?"

Kirkhardt looked bewildered for a second. He turned his glance toward Roger and saw nothing of the incriminating object.

"No, sir," mumbled Kirkhardt.

"Have I your permission to search you?"

"Yes, sir."

The professor lightly touched his pockets as Roger tossed the flask over the railing with a backhand movement. It fell noiselessly in the grass.

The professor turned to Roger. "May I search you?"

At last he turned back to Kirkhardt. "Have you been drinking?"

Kirkhardt defiantly met his eyes. "No, sir."

"You know it is strictly against training rules. Take a little walk before you go inside."

Kirkhardt walked stiffly off into the darkness. The professor looked inquiringly at Roger, then went inside.

Ann turned impulsively to Roger. "Why did you save him? He'd never do anything for you."

Roger was grim when he replied: "Not for him, but for the team. He's a valuable man."

Ann flung up her lovely young face sharply. She said: "You're always doing things for which other people get the credit. Do something for yourself!"

He was amazed at the intense feeling in her words. He recalled what she said about her father having seen "everything."

He said: "If you mean about football, I'm a running mate for the good of the team."

"I mean in everything," she flared. "When you do things for yourself you'll be a lot better off."

CHAPTER II.

SCRIMMAGE.

THOSE words were still ringing in his head during practice. He was fired with the spirit that animated her slender, lithe body.

But when the ball was given him, he had to sprint desperately to clear the scrub end, who had seeped through. It was a wide circling run, the kind the coach vetoed. He whirled past the end's clutching hands, fought through the halfback, plunged clear of the fullback, only to be brought down from behind by the scrub tackle.

"Borden," shouted O'Ferrall, "you tried that run in the Tech game. If you can't run forward, don't run at all."

Borden went back into his blocking capacity, ripping wide holes for the other backs to follow. Hackett called Roger off tackle, but he was instantly overwhelmed by tacklers.

"Kirkhardt," yelled the coach, "you didn't take that back out. A man is never out of the play until he's on the ground."

Roger detected a challenge in the sullen glance Kirkhardt threw him. When Roger carried the ball again, Kirkhardt slowed in front of him as they crossed the line of scrimmage. Roger stumbled over him and Kirkhardt leaped forward, dropping the incoming back. The tackle broke through on Roger before he picked up his stride and they fell heavily on Kirkhardt.

"Why the hell don't you fall clear," snapped the captain.

"Why the hell don't you give me an opening?" retorted Roger.

"Do you need an alley?" Kirkhardt sneered.

"I need as much as I give you."

"What's wrong with you guys?" O'Ferrall shouted. "Do you think we're running so smooth we can afford private fights? Kirkhardt, you and all the men depend too much on Borden. Borden, go on the scrubs temporarily. Grimes, take Borden's place on the varsity."

On the scrubs Roger knew the feeble excuse of depending on him was a cover for the coach's intention of avoiding conflict. The coach would sacrifice him to Kirkhardt. Not that O'Ferrall would try to get rid of Roger—they needed him—but he might try to decrease his importance, to keep things running smoothly.

The varsity, with the heavy Grimes in Borden's place, charged around the scrub end. Roger dashed in; he'd show them how useful he was. He dived into Grimes and split the interference wide open. Kirkhardt swerved. Roger whirled and leaped. His tackle was ankle-high and savage, tumbling Kirkhardt on his face.

The varsity tried every point on the scrub line and ends. They had faced some fierce tacklers in their experience, but none like Roger Borden. Every running trick they tried, speed or brute

force, it was the same. He tore into them like a human catapult and they were hurled to the ground with teeth-chattering force.

The backfield coach ventured to tell O'Ferrall: "They'll never get past Borden."

Kirkhardt stepped over to them. "We'll have to," he snapped.

"Well," snorted the worried coach, "it's a bum prospect when one man can stop a whole backfield. I've seen some tackling in my day, but none like that."

Kirkhardt interrupted with an angry: "I can get by him." No one could mistake the personal tone.

"All right, go ahead with the ball."

THE backfield coach didn't want to smile; he liked his job. He picked a blade of grass and chewed it as he warned Grimes to get lower.

It was the same as before. The backfield coach looked sharply. He thought Kirkhardt's foot rose in a vicious kick as Borden tackled him. They arose and there was a tiny stream of blood on Borden's face. O'Ferrall had not seen this, but he told the backfield coach:

"Looks as if Kirkhardt is trying to settle the old personal feud. Look at them glare. I think I'd better give the scrubs the ball or there'll be a fight."

The scrub quarterback tossed the ball to Roger on a lateral pass. Roger swung outward and the incoming end missed him. For once he was free! He hoped Ann was among the small group in the stands as he sprinted diagonally toward the side line and outran the tackle.

Gonzales overhauled him at the side line. Roger curved inward, straight into the charging Grimes. Roger shifted across field. Kirkhardt plowed in, and Roger cut sharply down field, shaking free of Kirkhardt's wild dive.

He raced for ten yards and swerved inward on the waiting Hackett. Pulling free, he picked up his stride, and weaved again toward the side line to elude the trailing end. He crossed the line, showing his heels to three pursuers.

Roger turned, expecting the coach's congratulations. Instead: "Even you have caught the exhibition fever. Don't you know better than crossing the field, cutting back? A fumble out there would mean a sure touchdown for the opponents. A decent tackle would have thrown you for a loss."

"Other backs run cross field and take chances," Roger said.

"You're not other backs. You're here for something else."

Roger stared at the coach. Here for something else. To slave for Kirkhardt and the coach's prides!

"That'll be all for to-day," the coach cut in on his thoughts. "To-morrow you go back on the varsity. They can't do a thing without you."

Roger turned toward the showers. He was going to take chances in the remaining two games to convince the coach and everybody else that he could run as well as block. His run to-day made that clear to him, and now that they couldn't play without him.

He moved off the road he had to traverse for twenty feet or so, in taking the route outside of the stadium, to allow a car to pass.

"Hey!" greeted several voices.

He glanced wearily up. His eyes immediately leaped. Ann was in the car with another girl and several fellows. He smiled, at Ann. The car sped on, leaving a swirl of fine dust.

They were coming from town; so she had missed his run!

WHEN Roger left the training table Friday evening, and emerged on the campus, he was wildly greeted by Buddy Whyte and a half dozen other students.

"Did you see the *Sun?*" they exclaimed.

"You're a hero," they laughed.

They thrust on him that day's *Sun*, which had just reached Midland. It was the forecast printed the day before the big games, which his friends had opened. He leaned against the building and read by the entrance lights:

> In favoring Midland to defeat Montcross by at least one touchdown we base our opinion on the invaluable playing of Borden. Both lines and backfields are strong, aggressive and seasoned. The opposing aces, Kirkhardt and Malherbe, are of the same caliber. In Borden's heroic defensive work Midland is practically invulnerable; he is never drawn out of position and his tackling is deadly. His thankless task of blocking is performed with an efficiency fatal to the most alert defense.

Roger returned the paper, smiling with tight lips. The door was flung open and Kirkhardt and Hackett came out.

"What's the noise about?" Kirkhardt demanded.

Bert Channing, who once shared the dishwashing machine with Roger and was now track captain and Olympic runner, said: "We've just discovered that the city papers are getting wise to the real power of the Midland team."

Channing had been a Commons waiter, and he and Kirkhardt had formed their mutual animosity in freshman year. Kirkhardt looked hard at him. He said:

"Let me see the paper."

"With pleasure." The paper, turned to the forecast, was handed him.

He read slowly and a dull red suffused his face. He continued looking at the paper long after he had finished, getting control of himself. Staring at Roger with venom in his eyes, he grated: "We'll see—in the game."

Roger marched boldly into the Gamma Delt house to see that things were running properly. He hated to face the snobs after his scene with one of their leaders, but he would not show them that. He entered the main door and walked at his usual gait through the hall. Two Gamma Delts were leaving the living room. To his surprise, they spoke with extreme cordiality.

He mounted the stairs and walked the second floor hall toward his room when he met another.

"Hello, Roger!" he said warmly. "Glad to see you're getting recognition."

HE had wanted to see Ann and ask her about the dance to-morrow night. The team was traveling to Montcross, three hours away, and a special train was running. With this little recognition he felt hopeful of her accepting, as he hurried over to her house.

"Ann," he said quietly, "I want to ask you to go to the dance with me in Montcross."

"Oh, Roger, I'm so sorry, but I've already promised Denny Kirkhardt."

Roger didn't know the correct reply to that. He said, sincerely: "I'm sorry, too."

Her dusky eyes were warm on him and she said: "I wanted to tell you about your notice in the *Sun*. It was splendid, but—they said your 'thankless task.'"

He raised his dark face to hers. "Is that why you don't want to go to the dance with me?"

"Don't be silly," she flared. "You hadn't asked me. Roger, I want you to know that you haven't done anything for yourself as long as it's a thankless task, which means for other people."

"It might mean for the team," he said in a low voice.

"You might do more for the team by doing what others do."

There was much he'd like to ask her, but her eyes looked so vehement, her gay little face so resolute, that he dared not.

"I hope I can find you in the stands to-morrow," he said simply.

"Well, remember, I can find *you*."

CHAPTER III.

ACCUSATION.

ROGER wondered if she were looking at him or Denny Kirkhardt, as the team ran on the field. He went through the before game paces, which he always hated. It was like being on parade. He wanted to play.

Ann was watching Roger, running down punts. She watched the lithe strength of his compact body. It was the type of figure you could pick out in a huddle of twenty-two men. Behind her a girl said to her companion: "What number is Borden?"

He rattled his program. "No. 7. There he is, the fellow running down the punt."

"Oh, what a powerful stride. I've seen him before, but never knew who he was."

"A prophet is not without honor, you know."

In the press box the *Times* reporter said to the *Sun* man: "How did you people happen to give Borden the write-up yesterday?"

"We believed it. I thought it was time the boy got some notice."

"Hope it doesn't go to his head today. They need him against Montcross. That Malherbe is a dangerous man."

"Yeah. He's flipping the coin now. Ah, Montcross receives."

The ball went slow and high into the waiting arms of Malherbe. His long loose figure started slow, it seemed. Then he curved like a shadow across the field, merged into the struggling huddle.

The Montcross stands started to its feet, raising a cry, as the long strides of Malherbe cleared the struggling throng. The cry choked off as a blue-jerseyed figure went into him and stopped him short. The thud was audible over the whole stadium.

The signboard read: "Ball Carried: 14. Tackled By: 7."

"That was Borden" swept over the stadium.

On the first play Roger was aware that the notice in the *Sun* was not lost on Montcross. Their interference was pointing for him. It was a hard fight breaking through a two-man interference. Frequently he only broke free as the runner was passing and he could get but a half tackle. It rested with a teammate to stop the back.

On short knifelike jabs the Montcross team was slowly bearing down the field. They passed midfield.

The one blocker who was left for the Midland end, Tazewell, failed to box him, and the end struck Malherbe, turning him around. Roger broke through the interference and was on Malherbe before he started. He threw him heavily for a yard gain.

Malherbe dropped back to kick, and Roger cried: "Look out for a pass!"

The pass came, low and hard. Roger rushed across to knock it down. He looked up and prepared to leap. Kirkhardt, running alongside him, stepped heavily on his foot. Roger stumbled. The ball passed over to a ready receiver. Kirkhardt plunged into the receiver from behind, stopping him after a fifteen-yard gain.

"Tackled By: 1," read the signboard.

Midland braced and held, winning the ball on downs. The stands settled back, breathing easily again. But the Midland advance was stopped short. Kirkhardt punted.

IN the second period Midland had the ball, and Hackett called another of the line plays, of the monotonous, dull-to-watch type which had availed little against the alert Montcross defense.

The ball was snapped. The backs plunged toward the line. A swift lateral pass was unseen by the spectators. Roger flashed in front of the ball and Kirkhardt, snatching it, followed him. The opposing end changed direction too late and Roger knocked him off. The burly half cut across, too late, and Roger blocked him viciously. Kirkhardt swerved outward as the roar of the stands started across the field. Malherbe bore in. Roger met him and they went down together.

The stands did not see who went down. They saw Kirkhardt flashing down the field, dodging the halfback, and speeding toward the safety man. He tumbled in a ferocious tackle after a gain of twenty yards.

"Kirkhardt!" the stands screeched.

The advance continued. The stands remained on its feet. They saw a huddle, struggling, heaving figures. Then one figure breaking clear.

"There he goes!"

"Kirkhardt!"

"Touchdown, Midland!"

"Hold 'em! Hold 'em, Montcross!"

The twenty-two men merged into a seething mass, once, twice, three times.

"Touchdown, Midland!"

"Hold 'em, Montcross!"

Three yards separated the Midland warriors from the goal, said the signboard. A moment later a relieved cheer arose from across the field, and the Midland rooters sank down disheartened into their seats.

Toward the end of the half Montcross uncorked a fake play that sucked the Midland end in. Three strong, the interference bore down on Roger. He ducked the first, plunged into the second, leaped from the lunge of the third and staggered clear. He whirled to see Malherbe speeding past, with Gonzales rolling over from his missed tackle.

Roger started after Malherbe. He had only gained about four yards, even though he was far on the side of the field, when Roger overtook him. Kirkhardt converged in at the same time. As Roger tensed to leap Kirkhardt jammed his foot under Roger's forward leg. Roger plunged forward, clutched frantically at the speeding Malherbe. Roger fell heavily as Malherbe sped on. It looked like a poor tackle from the stands.

Kirkhardt rushed after Malherbe and dived for him. The great Montcross back shifted free. Groans mingled with cheers as he bore into Hackett, the safety man. Groans were drowned in cheers as he eluded him and sped on for a touchdown.

"Malherbe! Montcross! Malherbe!"

And then a shrill voice: "Where was Borden?"

One reporter said: "Maybe the write-up did go to his head."

"There was something phony about that play," said the *Sun* man.

LATE in the third period they all agreed there had been something phony about the play. Roger was crashing through the interference and bringing down the mighty Malherbe with terrific thuds. Nearly every play flashed on the signboard with:

"Tackled by 7."

Montcross flashed a sudden forward near the Midland goal. Borden swooped down on it. The receiver was behind him, covered by Kirkhardt and Hackett. Ann saw Roger clutch the ball to him. It was on his own ten yard line and unexpected.

He swerved inward in a wide arc, weaving through the incoming tacklers. The stands started a cheer as he plunged into a tackler at the line of scrimmage and fought clear. The passer rushed in on him. Roger's firm figure glided sidewise in easy powerful strides, cutting sharply back. He leaped forward savagely, staggering clear of the tackler. The receiver had followed him back and hit him from behind.

The cheer died and the stands settled back. They were disappointed with a good run that didn't come off.

O'Ferrall said to the line coach: "That was a reckless play of Borden's —but Hackett and Kirkhardt should have taken that receiver out. I'm going to speak to them. I'm afraid they're carrying their feud on the field."

In the fourth quarter, when the Midland stands were getting nervous, Montcross was hurried in a kick. It went fast but low, and Hackett grabbed it on a bounce with no ends near him. Roger cut across him and neatly dumped the incoming end. Hackett continued toward the side lines. Roger ran alongside him. The Montcross tackle tried to dodge Roger, and Roger bumped him low, sprawling him.

Hackett changed direction and threw the other tackle off and turned directly downfield, running by the side lines. Roger ran parallel. The left half bore in. Roger slowed to meet him. The halfback slowed and Hackett speeded forward. The would-be tackler made a futile leap.

Roger hurried after Hackett, parallel again. The punter charged down on Hackett, who slowed down. The Montcross player slowed to tackle and Roger ran in and sent him reeling. Malherbe rushed in diagonally. He and Roger met in one of their many encounters and both went down. Hackett ran on with a clear field for a touchdown.

After the tying goal was kicked Hackett turned to Roger. "Thanks, old man. That was nice protection."

Both teams went into the fray with blood in their eyes. They fought brutally. Frequent substitutions were made on both teams.

Ann watched the broad sloping shoulders of Roger tear into the heap, buffeted, reel, and plunge again. The "7" was obscure in the gathering dusk, but that lithe Indian-like figure was ever present, charging forward, clashing in what must stop any human, and then plunging on. Kirkhardt was fighting desperately, but only for short gains; he couldn't clear the alert secondary defense.

There was less than five minutes of the game, but Midland couldn't gain. They punted. It was low and bounced. The tired Midland ends slowed in running down under it when the Montcross quarterback trotted to it. The

ball took its last weak bounce. The quarterback shot forward, recklessly scooping the ball with one hand, and sped through the bewildered ends. He continued down the field gathering an interference as he ran.

Borden, Gonzales and Kirkhardt converged on the back and one blocker. Roger dived low under the interference, dumping him, and clutching one kicking foot of the runner. The blocker fell on one side of him and the quarterback on the other, brought down by Gonzales. The heavy weight of Kirkhardt tumbled on Roger, and a sharp pain shot through his ankle. His leg went numb, a dizzy nausea enveloped him.

"What is it, Rog?" he heard the anxious voice of Gonzales.

"Nothing," Roger gritted.

He staggered to his feet, shaking his head to clear it. The pain was excruciating.

"Shall we call time out?"

"It's all right."

MONTCROSS started a determined advance. Each tackle Roger made was agonizing. The roars of the stands, the curses and dirt, the batterings, were in a fog to Roger. Midland held, and Hackett called an end run from a fake kick formation.

Roger automatically lunged forward, taking out the end. Kirkhardt swept toward the sidelines. Roger headed off a back, staggered on, overtook Kirkhardt when he dodged a tackler and started down the side line. Two tacklers bore in. Malherbe went for Roger. Roger dodged him and crashed to the ground with the other tackler. Malherbe rolled in the crash and Kirkhardt sped on with only the safety man waiting for him. Roger lay on the ground, writhing in agony.

The determined safety man dumped Kirkhardt on the forty yard line.

Roger limped up. The cry of "Kirkhardt" was deafening.

"Where the hell were you?" Kirkhardt whirled on him.

"On the ground."

"Where you belong!"

"Where you tried to put me."

The halfback's face blanched. Roger knew he was right in suspecting Kirkhardt of twisting his ankle. It had been physically impossible for either of the Montcross men, in the positions in which they were lying. The blood rushed back, darkening the leering face, and Kirkhardt gritted out:

"I'll see you after the game. Now I'll show you I don't need you. . . . Gimme the ball," he snarled at Hackett.

Kirkhardt hammered four times into the line for a bare first down. On the last play Roger had to haul himself up from taking his man out. The next play, Roger staggered through the line and his man escaped him. Kirkhardt was stopped for two yards. Kirkhardt shot off end. The end evaded Roger's reeling block, and so did the halfback.

They hit Kirkhardt like a thunderbolt and he was stopped for no gain.

"Letting them in on me," grated Kirkhardt.

Roger hardly heard him, what with the roaring in his head and the maddening yell of the crowd. Hackett faked another end run and flashed a perfect forward to the end, Tazewell, who scampered across the line with the game.

Kirkhardt's scowl grew black as "Tazewell," and not his own name was lifted on the voices of the rooters.

Kirkhardt was waiting for Roger when he limped into the showers.

"What's the idea of letting me down?" he cried. "Fine team work."

"Dose of your own medicine," Roger strained through his white lips.

"That's your second funny remark. What do you mean?"

"I mean that no interference is what I always get."

"What has that got to do with groveling on the ground?"

"I was put there." Roger looked steadily at him and saw the captain blanch.

Kirkhardt blustered: "What has that got to do with me?"

"Everything," Roger said.

"I've had enough from you, you damned hill-billy," grated Kirkhardt, and struck viciously at Roger's face.

Roger jerked his head, and the blow grazed. He plunged in, snapping: "I had enough from you when you twisted my ankle, you dirty coward."

Kirkhardt knocked off Roger's blow and flung sledgehammer fists at him. Roger weaved under these and shot quick jabs to his eye. Kirkhardt rushed in. A wild blow glanced off Roger, whose weakened ankle made him flounder. Kirkhardt threw in a terrific wallop to finish the mountain boy. Roger managed to duck under and came back with an overhand right from an eight-inch drive. The impact was like a shot, and the bigger man staggered back.

READY hands grabbed them.

"What's the matter with you guys?" the players cried, clustering around the two men.

Roger was white and trembling with rage.

Kirkhardt looked at the tense lithe figure, the sloping shoulders which had shot that body-jolting blow, and he hesitated.

"You heard him accuse me," he said.

"Yes, I heard him." Several voices sounded excitedly. "Can you prove it, Borden?" they demanded.

Roger was already sorry he had spoken—he hadn't intended to, but the words had been torn from him by Kirkhardt's goading. He turned slowly to Jim Hackett, who had run up just as the play happened and who was the only man behind them.

Roger felt it was a wild chance asking Hackett, Kirkhardt's best friend and president of the fraternity. He said:

"I think Hackett saw it."

Hackett was pale. He moistened his lips, and turned his eyes away from Roger. He said: "Yes, I saw the play. Borden fell."

An immediate clamor was raised by the squad.

"No, Borden fell and twisted his ankle," Hackett insisted.

The men talked excitedly among themselves.

Roger stood alone.

"That was a terrible thing to say," one of them said coldly to Roger.

"See here," said the assistant captain, Platt, "we won't stand for anything like that. You try to destroy our faith in our captain to settle a personal argument."

The other players chimed in with caustic remarks.

Roger remained silent before the onslaught, knowing he was right but powerless. The pain in his ankle was making him dizzy.

Dan, the trainer, came up. "That's enough of this. Let the doctor see his ankle."

The doctor probed with dexterous fingers. "Be about a week before it's strong again."

"I've got to play next Saturday."

The doctor looked dubiously to where the squad was gathered as they dressed. Kirkhardt was speaking vehemently. The doctor heard: "He's been making sly digs at me all season, half accusations."

Somebody said: "I won't play with him."

The doctor bent his head over the ankle.

"Next Saturday?" he said. "Well, you might."

The squad was finishing dinner when Roger limped in. Not a man spoke. They drifted out hurriedly and he ate alone. He had planned to see Ann at the dance to-night. He almost feared to go. Yet he must. He would never let them keep him away from her.

When he entered the dance he felt he was under a shadow. Fellows who had always been cordial and asked him about the game barely nodded. He summoned all his courage and stalked across the room, to break on Ann.

"Ann, may I cut in for an outside sit? I can't dance."

"No, thanks. I don't want an outside sit."

Her partner, thinking she would accept, had walked off.

"But my foot prevents dancing, and I want to talk with you."

"The point is," she said deliberately, "I don't want to talk to any one who makes accusations he can't prove."

Roger stared incredulously at her, his eyes dilating with pain as she turned away.

At practice next day no one spoke. He couldn't run on his ankle, but he followed in the signal practice. He took his calisthenics alone. Thursday he found he could run awhile on his foot. Friday he stood at the dummy practice, but O'Ferrall didn't ask him to try. Roger took a long run, and not until the end did his ankle hurt a little. When he returned to the showers the squad was there dressing.

O'Ferrall had looked queerly at Roger all week, but now Roger walked over to him, the whole squad watching.

"Coach," he said, "I'm well enough to play to-morrow."

"Borden," said the coach, "you've been a valuable man, and I like you. I've known about your feud with Kirkhardt for a long time, and I hoped nothing would ever come of it on the field. But the men feel that a man who would make such a malicious attack as your accusation was would break the morale of the team in a big game. They would feel unsure of what you might do."

Roger turned and faced his teammates. He met cold hostility in their gazes. Hackett stirred uncomfortably. Roger read his fate in their silence, and he left the showers.

Even though O'Ferrall was a good friend of Kirkhardt and a Gamma Delta Gamma himself, that made no difference now. Roger actually had made an unproved accusation which caused a strained atmosphere. From the standpoint of the coach and the team, they were justified in not wanting him to play.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SOUTHWESTERN GAME.

ROGER left his last class Saturday and hurried to his room. Inside the dormitory square and out of sight, he climbed the stairs slowly. The place was deserted with every one

at the game. He sank on the bed, his head numb with pain.

It was the biggest game of the season: Southwestern, those sturdy giants who traveled half a continent and overflowed the eighty thousand seats in the Stadium with enthusiastic spectators. For three years they had defeated Midland.

It was the hope of Southwestern to graduate a whole class without bowing to their ancient rivals, and this was the last desperate effort of Midland to give their graduating class one victory. The newspapers thought the chances about even, perhaps with a slight edge on Southwestern with their larger number of first-rate backs: Gordell, O'Flaherty, Bersch.

Roger remembered them all. He smiled bitterly as he read the early editions of the city papers: "So far the betting has been even. Last night, as the rumor spread that Borden would be out of the game, odds went to three to two and five to three on Southwestern."

It was small recompense. He heard the Midland band passing on their way to the Stadium. They were playing:

> From the banks of old Midland's shore
> Resounds that victory cry—

Roger arose to close his windows. He couldn't stand *that*. His door burst open, and Buddy Whyte and Bert Channing and a dozen other students crowded in.

"Rog, you darn fool, get down there and get in your uniform."

He looked at them dully. "You don't know what's happened."

"Oh, yes, we do," they shouted. "Do you think we believe Denny Kirkhardt? We're surprised at the team. You go down there and play as you never played before."

"I can't go where I'm not wanted."

Kirk Jeffers, the senior president, stepped forward: "We represent the student body, and we want you." And Buddy Whyte: "I'm Kirkhardt's fraternity brother, and I say I want you to play, even if he doesn't."

Roger still hesitated.

With a concerted rush they grabbed him. Half protesting, he was rushed down the stairs. Into a huge car he was piled, with six students sitting on him. Bert Channing and Kirk Jeffers were in front. Kirk had always been a model of decorum. To-day he shattered all traditions of wild driving at Midland.

"Let me go in alone, fellows," Roger begged at the gym.

The team had just left the lockers for its workout before the grand stand.

As he entered, Dan, the trainer, said: "I'm glad to see you here, boy. It took a lot of nerve, but I believe in you. Let me see that ankle." Over the tight adhesive tape he placed small splints, wrapping them around with an ordinary leather athletic ankle supporter. "I hope you get in the game, son."

Roger trotted along the side lines as Southwestern kicked off. He silently took a seat at the end of the scrub line. The coach and the men glanced briefly at him, but no one spoke. Several faces showed relief.

In the press box the typewriters were clicking out rapid copy: "Midland started without Borden. Their first rush was stopped abruptly. The brilliant Southwestern ends seeped through and halted Kirkhardt for slight gains."

On the Southwestern side six jaunty lads rushed before the stands, shaking their fists rhythmically and shouting:

"Ray! Team! Ray! Ray! Team! Team! Team! Let's go-o-o!" The dying words were drowned in a spontaneous cheer as the Southwestern stands rose to its feet. Gordell was sweeping around end. Five, ten, fifteen, twenty yards. Jim Hackett halted him in a desperate tackle.

Above the Stadium the typewriters clicked away: "Southwestern was stopped on Midland's eight yard line by a gallant stand. Kirkhardt tried the end on a fake kick and was thrown for one yard. Midland kicked to midfield."

"Come on, Southwestern!"

THE white-clad cheer leaders in front of the Midland side frantically strove to infuse life in the depressed rooters. Then Midland rose to its feet of its own accord. "Gonzales!" That sturdy back had intercepted a pass on his twenty yard line and fought it back five yards.

Professor Grayson chewed his pipe nervously. Ann huddled in a miserable bundle beside him.

Behind them an old graduate said to his companion: "What's the matter with Kirkhardt? He's not running as well as last year."

His more recently graduated companion said: "He needs those ends taken out. Borden's the man. . . . Oh!" he groaned.

Kirkhardt was smothered for a loss.

O'Ferrall's lined face grew more glum. He looked down the squad at Borden as Midland kicked.

The Southwestern stands were in a continual uproar. Time out was called when Midland stopped another rush near their goal. The Midland band valiantly played "The Tiger Marches" and a few half-hearted cheers drifted dismally across the field.

In the press box the typewriters clicked: "Kirkhardt tried a fake cross buck through tackle on a kick formation. He found no opening and was thrown back. Midland punted to midfield."

O'Ferrall sent in Powell for Grimes as Southwestern began an advance.

"What the hell's the matter?" he growled at the bruised back.

"They're playing the roughest game I've ever been in," Grimes alibied. "They're running four backs from one formation, and nobody knows where they're coming. Kirkhardt is crazy because he can't gain. He can't gain without Borden, nor can anybody else but Borden stop that rush."

"Aw," the coach breathed with relief. "They stopped that one."

Midland stands watched their ace struggle against a defense that threw him heavily. An uncollegiate spectator who had paid four dollars and forty cents to witness some broken field running shouted: "Come on, Kirkhardt!" The Southwestern stands tauntingly took up the cry: "Yeh, come on, Kirkhardt!" Derisive yells followed. "Stop Kirkhardt!"

Professor Grayson gnawed at his pipe. "This is the worst showing I've ever seen a Midland backfield make. Kirkhardt is a flop."

Ann said: "They need Roger; they can't win without him."

"My girl, if you want Midland to win, tell that young man what you told me."

"I called him unfair, dad; I know I was unfair for thinking that he'd make an accusation unless he was sure."

"Ann, don't let pride stop you."

Around the wall of the Stadium opening, past which the team ran to

the lockers, a struggling mass of men and women were yelling like madmen. Ann elbowed and squeezed her way through to the wall. She got her elbows on the edge and drew herself up. She looked over as a sure Southwestern foot kicked goal after the first touchdown. They must have scored during her run down and under the Stadium. The crowd was pushing and bickering around her. She held to her foothold, hearing fragments: "I'll take you at five to one on Southwestern." "I'll give you three to one that Kirkhardt doesn't score."

A great cheer rose from across field and the half ended.

She watched the battered Midland warriors as they ran by. She saw Kirkhardt, his face bruised, dirt-grimed, and contorted with rage. The fresh untried scrubs came next, and at the end, running lightly, came Roger.

"Roger!"

He looked up, and the dull light left his eyes.

"Roger, forgive me for my hasty judgment. Go in and win for Midland. I believe in you!"

He said nothing. The emotions rushing over him choked utterance. He smiled into her excited little face and rushed toward the showers.

A group of students crowded the door, shouting:

"Play Borden! We want Borden!"

Roger pushed through to the coach.

"I want to play," he said.

The coach turned helplessly to the men.

"We can't win without him—but you men refuse to play with a man who impugned the name of the squad. Personally—" He floundered.

Hackett stepped forward, dead white.

"Men, I'm sorry," he said. "I apologize to you, Borden. Kirkhardt is my best friend and—and—oh, hell, I can't keep quiet now. I saw Kirkhardt twist Borden's ankle."

The team arose to its feet. Roger made himself heard above the tumult: "Let them play. We need them."

THROUGH the stands, like a breeze, rustled the words, "Borden is in," as Midland kicked off. In the press box the reporters soon stopped looking at the signboard for the confirmation of "Tackled by 7," as they pounded out: "Gordell thrown for a loss by Borden." "O'Flaherty stopped for no gain by Borden." "Bersch was thrown heavily by Borden."

Behind Ann the graduates said: "The boy is playing inspired football."

Professor Grayson smiled at Ann's glowing face, and said: "What inspired him?"

Midland took the ball, and the band played:

"We break down the line and circle the end,
We raise the blue banner in triumph again,
We're shouting her name as legions of men
Fight! Fight! Fight!"

Eighty thousand eyes focused on a pantherlike blue-clad figure who charged into the crimson jerseys, opening gaps and flaying Southwestern tacklers. The Midland backs followed. The Southwestern end fought Roger as though he had the ball.

"We'll get *you* next time," the end snarled.

Gordell cursed as he was cut down. "That 'll be all for you, 'white hope.'"

But Roger crashed into their raised

cleats, he shouldered their underhand fist thrusts, and cleared the way.

The Southwestern side rose to its feet, its loud cheer drowning out the suddenly silenced Midland rooting. Kirkhardt, in his blind rage to gain, had fumbled, and a Southwestern tackle pounced on the ball.

The reporters took their feet off the desks and bent closer to the machines. "Playing the greatest defensive game ever witnessed on Midland Stadium, Borden threw terror into the ranks of Southwestern. O'Flaherty tried to circle end and was thrown in a savage tackle for a three yard loss by Borden. Southwestern kicked over the Midland goal."

On the Midland side the cheers did not start again. Borden still tore into the crimson jerseys, but Midland did not gain. Kirkhardt was fighting madly, without skill or direction, his face contorted with maniacal fury. Midland could not see his face; they only saw his huge body plunge forward, flounder like a cow in a bog, and go down.

Hackett started the usual Kirkhardt play. It was a fake thrust, in which Roger took the ball on a lateral pass. His run was unexpected, and he cleared the line of scrimmage before he was hit by tacklers. A lack of interference was nothing new to him. He shifted, twisted, fought clear, cut in, swerved out, and plunged fighting to the ground for a first down.

Hackett frequently gave the ball to Roger after that, and with Gonzales alternating with Kirkhardt the defensive was not so successful in guessing the ball carrier. The Midland rooters rose to their feet. The nonpartisan spectators in the Stadium behind the goal post rose to their feet to witness the gallant march.

Professor Grayson smiled patiently as Ann's fingers dug into his flesh. Old graduates failed to notice as strangers clapped them on the back. In the press box the reporters crowded their copy with x's; they didn't take their eyes from the field. The players could not hear the signals.

"Give it to Borden," they said.

IT was first down past midfield, and Roger swung out to take the ball on a lateral pass. Kirkhardt, going out for deception and interference, snatched the ball. He had seen an opening. As he swung sharply inward, the opening was closed and a clean tackle cut him low. A tackle plunging through hit him as he fell.

Both stands gave a yell; the ball was rolling from his hands. Two blue and two crimson jerseys dived together, and the whole Stadium grew silent as they wrestled for it. The referee parted them, put his foot on the ball, and pointed toward the Midland goal. The Midland groan mingled with Southwestern cheers.

Grimes came running on the field.

"Grimes for Kirkhardt," he called to the umpire.

Kirkhardt stood bewildered; then he dashed from the field, not toward the bench, but toward the lockers. As he stumbled in he heard a wild cheering. It sounded like "Borden." When he emerged, ten minutes later, headed away from his disgrace, he knew it was for Borden they were yelling.

The Southwestern stands boomed monotonously: "Stop Borden!" Their team tried to respond. They fought and slugged and piled on. Later Dan, the trainer, said there wasn't a square inch of white flesh on Roger's body. But his grim smile never wavered as he fought twice almost to the Southwestern goal, only to be hurled back.

He was making his third march, from one end of the field to the other, making a new mark in Midland football history.

Southwestern waited for him. Eleven men fought through ten valiant Midland blockers to reach the one plunging, twisting, whirling back, who was like nothing on earth. Ann saw the "7" flash, swoop forward, dipping and rising, fighting through obstacles that seemed impossible.

Near the Southwestern goal, its defenders tightened again. Roger swept wide off end. The defense swayed and charged to meet him. Then a frantic cry from a back, the shriek of the stands, and Hackett flashed a pass over the goal line to Tazewell.

Southwestern sent in reserves and started a final attack. Dusk was gathering over the field, and the blue and crimson became indistinct. Twenty-two fighting men merged into a seething heap. One lithe, powerful figure was the focus of all eyes as he tore into runners and dropped them.

Southwestern had eight to go on third down at midfield, and Bersch dropped back to kick. Then the Stadium held its breath. Bersch poised the ball a moment, then shot it far downfield to a speeding end. It sailed at least thirty yards when the end curved to catch it.

A swift figure rushed in before his outstretched hand. He leaped high, spearing the ball, and shot across field in a wide arc.

Deafening roars of "Come on, Borden!" conflicted with frantic cries of "Stop Borden!"

The figure sped down the side line on winged feet. Tacklers threw themselves at him. He twisted, staggered, and swept on. Three men merged on him. He weaved in, curving back, twirling away from the third.

Ann, hanging over the Stadium wall, saw him pick up his stride in a gallop as he cleared the tackler and veered inward. The burly Gordell bore down and leaped. Ann saw the fury of the encounter, directly in front of her. She saw Roger's white, set face as he twisted forward, spun free and staggered.

She held her breath as two determined pursuers came on him. He shifted in, curved away, staggering. She saw his sturdy legs as they propelled him free, going into his swift and easy stride and on across the goal line.

WHEN the umpire's whistle ended the game a minute later, Ann was swept into the field by the hordes. Mighty waves of cheers rolled over her as she struggled to stay in the front of the rushing mob.

"Roger!" she cried. "Roger!"

Exultant with his triumph, he was no longer shy. As the throngs milled around him, grabbing his hand and slapping his sore shoulders, he strode forward and took her in his arms.

She lifted her flushed face to his.

"You're wonderful!" she breathed. "I knew you could do it."

"I knew," he said, "you were for me."

"You knew I was for—you?"

"Aren't you—for me alone?"

"I will be," she said submissively, looking around at the frenzied crowd, "when you get me out of this mob."

For the first time, Roger received adequate interference. The squad of his teammates, shouting his name, wedged an opening through the spectators.

THE END.

Some one was inside the hut!

The Snow Girl

Deep in the frozen wastes of the south polar ice, David Dragon battles to rescue a girl and save a mysterious Antarctic kingdom

By RAY CUMMINGS

Author of "Princess of the Atom," "The Shadow Girl," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JOE WELCH, who is telling the story, David Dragon, and Helga Johnson, on duty for the United States Government along the Antarctic Trans-polar air route, are kidnaped by bandits.

An American, Roberts, had been unjustly imprisoned, and escaped to found a colony of renegades in the Antarctic, hoping for vengeance on the United States; and he implanted this idea deeply in his beautiful daughter Naina, who succeeded him in power. His bandits had captured Helga Johnson's father, an inventor, from a Polar expedition, and got his blue rays, a death-dealing cold ray that creates the terrible "blue blizzards" with which Naina threatens the Antarctic colony of Little America.

Ramón Margones, a Chilean who joined Naina's colony in the hope of finding Antarctic gold, overhears the captive Johnson tell Helga of its loca-

This story began in the Argosy for November 2.

tion. He kills Johnson, kidnaps Helga, and escapes with his men on sleds, heading for the golden mountain.

Joe is in distant Little America where he had been sent with Naina's ultimatum. Margones's Chileans have wrecked Naina's lone plane; so David and the outraged princess Naina pursue Margones, with her swiftest dog team. As Margones approaches the mountain, snow falls to hide his tracks. He camps on the mountain, sending one Lupe Albeniz to the nearest radio-equipped travelers' shelter to summon help from the Chilean colony of Santiago Pequeño and to claim the lode in the name of Chile.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LIGHT IN THE HUT.

"THEY stopped here."

"Yes, that's evident."

"I think, David, we're only an hour or two behind them—perhaps not even that much."

David and Naina had been traveling some six hours. The weather was still clear. David had feared every moment that it might snow and obliterate the trail. There was always that danger; the weather in Antarctica changed often with startling rapidity. It was as yet, a calm night of low temperature; but David, running at the handles of the sled, found himself warm.

Twice in the six hours they had stopped to rest and to eat. By the stars, David knew that they were heading in a general northerly direction across the floor of this great valley. The mountains of the encircling rim now loomed ahead of them, miles away as yet, a frowning wall against the sky. The Chilean colony lay this way, that was obvious.

It was arduous traveling, yet for the polar night in Antarctica the conditions were unusually favorable. A frozen tundra, was this rocky floor, undulating like a great white desert. For miles it had been good sledging—drift snow fairly hard and firm. Then they had come to a broken region. Frequent *bergschrunds*—gaping crevices of tremendous depths formed as the body of a glacier moves from the snowfield—were encountered. The bandits' trail picked its way past them.

They crossed what to David seemed some frozen, land-locked sea, then again came upon a glacier with walls of rock from a mountain spur. A field of *sérac* ice was here, wedged masses of icy pinnacles created by the dragging strains on the glacier surface.

They made at times no more than a few miles an hour; but David knew that Margones could do no better, if as well. He thought of Helga, out here in this cold purple night. A sled so easily could side-slip. He prayed that they might not overtake Margones's sled with tragedy come upon it.

The rough area was passed; they came again upon the frozen plans.

"He stopped here," said Naina. They stood beside the evidence of where the bandits had made a brief camp—the remains of food; a melted, refrozen place in the snow where some sort of stove had been set.

"An hour or two ahead of us," Naina repeated.

David, poking about the remains of the camp, stooped suddenly.

"What is that?" she demanded sharply.

David held it up. Helga's handkerchief.

"She thinks we may be following." He made no further comment. In the dimness of the night, especially in bro-

ken country, they could approach fairly close to the bandits without discovery. But not too close.

"We had better rest awhile, Naina. And the dogs need it."

He fed the dogs, and then got out a sleeping-bag. "Don't you want to sleep for an hour or two?"

"No," she said.

They sat together and ate some dried, salted meat and fish. They heated water.

WHENEVER they stopped like this, to David came the consciousness of how alone they were. The barrier between them was so frail a thing. He found now that her gaze was steadily on him. As always, it set his heart wildly pounding.

"Naina!"

He laid a hand on her shoulder. The impulse came to sweep her in his arms. He had so often felt it! He repeated her name unsteadily.

This barrier between them—if he could once hold her in his arms, his lips on hers, it would break down.

He thought wildly, "She doesn't know what love means—but she can feel it, feel what I am feeling."

"Naina, dear."

He abruptly held her in his arms. His face went to hers. But he saw fear in her eyes. Fear of this torrent sweeping her.

She pushed at him. "David! Why—" The fear turned to anger. "Let me go!"

It was exasperating. "You foolish little girl, don't—fight with me—"

"Let me go!"

Anger. It was her instinctive defense. He saw that beneath the show of anger, she was really frightened.

He released her. "I'm sorry, Naina."

There was a silence. He watched her anger fading. She said presently: "We mustn't stay here too long. Would he dare take Helga over the Chilean border?"

They discussed it as though nothing had happened between them. Naina was convinced that the bandit was in love with Helga, desiring her so that he had forced all his men to this sudden flight, and that he was taking Helga over the Chilean border, where in Santiago Pequeño he might force her to marry him.

"The United States would not bother him then, David."

As an explanation of Margones's purpose it did not sound very plausible to David. But he could think of nothing better.

He said now, cautiously: "Do you suppose there's a raidophone near?"

She knew of one. She thought it was some thirty miles ahead.

"If they head that way," she said. "But why, David?"

"I was thinking it might be difficult for us to attack Margones. He has twenty men or more, armed."

Her eyes were wide. "Use weapons against me? They would not dare."

"They might. They're desperate." He saw her annoyance rising, but he plunged. "They used weapons and attacked your plane. I was thinking—are you friendly toward Chile? The government, I mean?"

"No. They have never recognized me as anything but the daughter of the White Bandit. My Antarctican government—"

"Well, I thought we might phone somewhere for help, for a plane."

"The Norwegians," she said. "There is the Whaling Company at Alert Bay. I have nothing against them."

"Yes, if we phoned, a plane could reach us in a few hours. Is it a thousand miles to Alert Bay? Not over that."

It was farthest from David's plans. But now he only wanted to get Naina to locate this phone-hut. He gazed at the stars; a sheen of mist was over them.

"We'd better get started," he said. "If the snow comes and obliterates the trail—we're finished—"

A blizzard, striking them out here, might be more than they could weather. But neither of them was considering that.

THEY started again, and traveled another hour or two. The snowfall came; thick white flakes were now falling steadily, but still there was very little wind.

They struggled forward, lashing the dogs to top speed. They were winding into the white foothills of mountains. The bandits' trail was filling up. David saw it with sinking heart.

They passed into a white gorge. Steeply up through drift snow. A wind was here. Whirlies danced around them—whirlpools of the drift snow, caught and tossed by the wind, ghostly dervishes whirling in the dimness. They struggled on, just as, not much more than an hour ahead of them now, the bandits with Helga, had struggled.

They came out of the gorge into a broad valley. The wind eased up. The snow had suddenly ceased a few moments before; but now it came again. The valley was a dull gray-white blur. The bandits' trail, almost hidden now, led off to the left.

Naina said suddenly: "I think I've passed over this valley in the plane. The phone-hut is off there." She gestured to the right. She told David what she remembered of the topography of this valley.

David said, "There's a storm coming."

It seemed so; a premonitory blast of wind, flinging the drift against them so that the dogs stopped and huddled with their drooping backs to it. A blast suddenly ended and gone. But David knew it would come again.

"Well, if you say there are cave-mouths over there, Naina," he gestured the way Margones had taken, "he'll camp here. He won't dare go any farther in this. We'd better get to the travelers' hut if we can find it."

She acquiesced. They left the trail and started off to the right. At that moment Margones and his band were camping on the ledge a few miles away in the other direction.

The snow every moment came thicker. There was another blast. They weathered it, and struggled on.

Naina was not sure enough of the locality. They went up a broken frozen slope; they reached the open uplands of a plateau.

"We're going wrong," said Naina.

They turned and went diagonally back. To David came the fear that they were lost. And unmistakably this was the start of a bad storm.

They saw the little stone hut like a haven in the murk close ahead of them. The snow was blowing around it. The international flag at its peak was a tiny waving spot. They were on the upper level, behind the hut. David saw that it stood on a brink, fronting the storm-tossed valley.

They dashed forward. But something made David bring them to a sudden halt. The sled stopped; the dogs turned their backs to the wind. It had seemed to David that a moving spot of

light had showed at the hut. It was only a few hundred feet ahead now, a dark oblong in the gloom of the night.

Was some one there? It seemed so.

David commanded the lead dog to lie down. He shoved Naina behind him.

"I'll go on foot."

They crept forward, dim, cautious white figures. David gripped his automatic. The little building loomed ahead of them. Its windows were barred with shutters. The spot of light was gone now. The place seemed deserted.

But was it?

They crouched at a corner of the building. The wind drove the snow about them with a low whine. A window was near at hand. Through its shutter-slits a blue flare of light was flickering!

Tiny flashes of blue light. Some one was here! Some one, inside the hut, using a radiophone!

"Naina, wait—keep away!"

With his ear to the shutters, David could hear. And he found Naina pressing against him, listening also.

A man was inside, talking in Spanish, his voice mingled with the hissing and flickering of the instrument. David caught a little of it, and Naina whispered a translation. One of Margones's men talking to Santiago Pequeño. Gold discovered here! The radiophone was equipped with the code-wave apparatus—the bandit could talk freely. Gold had been discovered here years ago by Johnson, of the old Blakely expedition, he said, but never recorded. Margones could get it now with the Chilean flag—

For a moment David was stricken into inactivity. A Chilean plane would be coming within an hour or so.

Within the hut, the bandit disconnected the instrument. David found his wits.

"You wait here," he whispered. "I'll go around the front—the door may be open."

On the brink of the cliff he crept along the front wall of the hut. He saw that the narrow door stood open.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE STORM SHELTER.

THERE was only one man in the room—a small, swarthy fellow in a white garment with a belt around his middle. He stood by the radiophone which he had just disconnected. The room was almost dark, only the vague sheen of light from the fading instrument tubes. David crouched in the doorway. The bandit was fumbling about.

The light faded into blank darkness. David felt Naina beside him.

"Get back," he whispered vehemently.

The room was suddenly flooded with a dull-yellow vacuum glare; the bandit had found the switch. It startled David; he stood revealed by the light. The bandit saw him. His lower jaw dropped; his fiercely upturned mustache twitched with his surprise.

David's weapon was raised. "Put up your hands!"

But the fellow, with disconcerting promptness, took a header and flung himself on the floor. David's shot went over his head. The report split the little room with a muffled, echoing crack. David followed it with a leap. He landed upon the half crouching figure; he felt his sleeve rip with an upflung knife thrust.

They rolled on the stone floor. David was far the stronger, and more than fifty pounds heavier. He caught the fellow's wrist, twisted the knife away.

David had dropped his automatic; he saw Naina dash forward and pick it up.

"Get back, Naina, I've got him!"

The bandit was squirming, with David sitting on his chest. The Chilean tried to get his automatic from the holster at his belt; but David reached for it, jerked it out and flung it back to Naina. And from his adversary's belt David also ripped the cylinder-weapon of the Johnson ray.

The little fellow suddenly squealed, "I stop! I stop!"

He twisted violently, trying to throw David off; and David cuffed him in the face.

"No, *señor*—I stop!"

"Well, if you stop, lie still, you damn fool."

He lay quiet. David pulled him to his feet. The Chilean stood eying them, then quailed as he saw Naina.

"Got any other weapons?" David demanded.

"No, *señor—no tengo ningunos.*"

David searched him. "What's your name?"

"He's Lupe Albeniz," Naina burst out. She flung a flood of Spanish at him, and he cringed before her. He was obviously far more frightened of Naina than of David.

"Easy, Naina." David pushed her away. His mind was flying. Gold discovered here. Helga's gold! United States gold! The Chileans were coming to claim it. The message had gone in; too late to stop it now.

"How far is Margones from here?" David demanded.

"*Señor?*"

"I said—Naina, does he understand English or doesn't he?"

Lupe evidently wanted to be ingratiating. His face was gray; his dark eyes swam with fear of Naina.

"Me understan' the English—not so fast, you spik."

"Ask him, Naina."

HE listened to their Spanish. Outside the little stone room the wind was now howling. Snow was blowing through the open doorway. David slid the door closed.

"Watch him, Naina! What's he say?"

"A few miles from here; not far, across the valley. You could see their camp from here if the snow would stop."

Lupe described it. He might be lying, but he seemed truthful.

"Is Helga there?"

"*Si, señor.*" He added with a grin: "She love Ramón—they get the married in Santiago Pequeño."

"Shut up," said David. He cast his eye about the room. It was some thirty feet long by half as wide. There was the phone mechanism; the lights; a storage electrical heater; an electrical stove; a few pieces of dilapidated furniture; a litter of bedding; two built-in bunks.

Across one end, a partition divided off a smaller space into another—a windowless room. Tinned food stood here on a shelf; there were ropes; a block and tackle; coils of wire; spare radio tubes and vacuum light tubes; and a box of tools. Also some cooking utensils.

David seized a length of rope and came back.

"Stand away, Naina."

Lupe eyed him. "What you do?"

"Shut up. I won't hurt you."

"She no hurt me?"

"No," David assured him. "I'm going to tie you up, that's all."

"You sen' me Santiago Pequeño—*no he hecho nada—*" He wandered

into swift Spanish apologies and excuses.

"Never mind that," said David. He roped the little bandit securely and carried him bodily into the storeroom.

"You lie there. Not a word out of you. Understand?"

"*Sí, señor.* I no spik, *nada.*"

"Good." David came back and faced Naina.

"What you going to do?" she demanded.

"Phone for help. We haven't any time to lose. You found the heat switch?"

"Yes."

The room was warming. Naina had closed the glassite windows; the electrical stove was glowing.

"Good enough. We'll have to stay here for awhile. Listen to that storm."

It surged about the compact little building. David flung off his furs. He stood gazing down at Naina.

"Take off that cloak; you'll be too hot." He helped her discard it. He did it swiftly; he was in a hurry, but he did not want to show it. Something in Naina's watchful gaze warned him.

"There's food in there," he said, "and utensils. How about fixing us something hot?"

He turned away, but she seized him. "Where are you going to phone—phone to whom?"

"Little America," he said shortly.

"No! I won't let you!" She gripped him. "I won't let you!"

HE finally pushed her away. Too much time had passed already. Little America was much farther away than Santiago Pequeño, and the Chileans were already warned and preparing to come.

"Naina, don't be a fool."

"I won't let you!"

She stood in her long white dress; her pale golden braids dangled; her eyes were blazing.

Strange, imperious beauty!

She reached to seize one of the automatics which she had placed on a chair along with the cylinders of the Johnson cold light. But David stopped her.

"Don't bother me, Naina. I'm in a hurry, can't you see it?"

Their challenging gazes crossed. And as she stood fronting him with breast swiftly rising and falling, abruptly David's annoyance was gone. A wild tumult swept him.

"Naina, you don't understand."

"I won't let you call the Americans."

He murmured as though to himself, "I'll make you understand."

His arms went around her. He crushed her against him.

"Let me go! David—let me go!"

She fought, struggled, like a child against his huge lean body. She pounded at his chest with her fists.

"Let me go!"

"No, not this time."

He was bending her backward. As she fought, his senses swept off upon a torrent of passion.

"Naina—I love you! Don't you know it?"

He held her face, against all her twisting efforts. Her lips were parted with trembling breath.

"David—please!"

Fear was in her eyes. But something else now; a coming tenderness. Surrender.

"Naina, I love you."

As he kissed her, and she helplessly fought, he felt her suddenly go limp in his arms.

"Naina, this is love! Don't you understand?" He kissed her again.

Limp in his arms, now she hid her face against his shoulder. He kissed

her hair; and as her white arms came up, and her fingers gripped his shoulder, he kissed her hand.

"Love, Naina—and it makes everything different. You haven't understood."

"David, I—"

"Say it"'

"I—"

"Say it!"

She murmured, "I—love you, David."

"Love me?" His passion melted into sudden tenderness. "Love me? You know it now! Kiss me, Naina. Look! I've let you go. I'm not holding you."

He stood drooping, with his arms at his sides. And she flung herself upon him, clinging with her arms about his neck, her eager lips held up to him, and drew his face down, and kissed him.

"There—does that prove I love you? Does it, David? And this—and this. Oh, David, I never knew that love could be a thing like this!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DECOY.

NAINA sat watching David as he connected the radiophone.

"Can you get them?"

"Yes, I hope so."

He smiled into her luminous eyes. "We'll do our best. If only this storm doesn't hold them back!"

He made the connections. There was no answer to the call, for ten minutes or more. The wind howled outside the hut.

"Oh, David. Helga's over there—they'll take her to Santiago Pequeño. How can we get her back? He can force her to say she married him voluntarily. The United States would have no claim on her then."

The call was answered. Little America came in.

"I want Joseph Welch," David said briefly. "David Dragon speaking. International hut eleven." The number was on the instrument. "Is he there?"

"Yes, I can find him," said the operator's voice.

"Hurry with it! Danger here—matter of life and death! I want the United States wave code—don't want this picked up anywhere else."

After what seemed an eternity to David I came on the circuit. He told me hurriedly what had transpired.

"A plane available there, Joe?"

There was. The warplanes from Dunedin had not yet arrived. We had done nothing during those hours since Naina's threat, except try to communicate with her and wait for the warplanes. But we had a commercial plane available.

My heart sank at what David was telling me. Helga, captured by the Chilean bandits!

"Just where are you, David?"

"International Station Eleven."

"Where is that?"

"How do I know where it is? Look it up on your registry chart."

I could do that of course. "We'll start at once."

"Yes. Bring official witnesses and the flag. And men and weapons, Joe; there are twenty of these bandits."

He outlined his plan. I was to fly directly to the hut. We would have to figure some way to rescue Helga. To attack the bandits openly might mean her death.

"Hurry, Joe. If the Chileans get there first—I'm helpless here—they'll plant the Chilean flag, record the strike officially and be gone with Helga."

"Yes. I'll rush.' '

"How's the weather, Joe?"

"Terrible."

The storm was raging in Little America even worse than in David's locality. But it would be a flight with the wind.

"All the better," said David hurriedly. "The Chilean plane will be heading into it. Do your best, Joe."

He presently disconnected.

"Nothing we can do but wait, Naina."

HE envisaged the two planes—one from the Chilean Colony and one from Little America—racing here on the wings of the storm; each eager to be the first to plant their national flag, to record this golden mountain, to establish a new settlement here.

But it was more than that. If the Chileans came first, Helga would be snatched away. And if the plane from Little America came first—David shuddered as he thought of Helga, over there with Margones.

How could the bandits be openly attacked? Margones, with his golden prize snatched from him, his own safety menaced, would undoubtedly kill Helga at once.

"Nothing to do, but wait." He met Naina's queerly earnest face. Gentle now, tender, her eyes luminous as stars.

"I was thinking, David."

She drew him to the door and they opened it. The wind and snow swirled in, a frigid blast—they flung the door closed.

David had seen that although the wind was every moment stronger, it was, for the moment, hardly snowing at all.

Naina clung to him. "I was thinking—won't Margones wonder why Lupe doesn't come back? Do you suppose he'll send over here to see what's happened?"

They had been in the hut now perhaps half an hour or more. Such a possibility had not occurred to David, but it was obvious.

The door had an interior lock. They turned it, and flung down into place a heavy bar. The windows were all barred; these international huts were constructed to give refuge from possible attack.

They went to one of the windows fronting the valley, slid its shutter aside. Through the double glassite panes the murk of the night was visible. Blackness overhead; scudding black clouds; wind-clouds, rather than snow. Momentarily a patch of stars showed.

"You suppose our light might be seen by Margones, David?"

"I don't know. Perhaps."

It seemed to David that he could vaguely make out the form of the mountains across the valley floor. But no light showed over there. Would Margones come, or send others of his men to investigate what had happened to Lupe?

The captive was lying quietly in the storeroom. There had not been a word, or a sound out of him.

"I was thinking, David—you said, nothing to do, but wait; is that all we can do? Do we dare wait? I was thinking—my father once told me about the Alpha International Helio Code. Do you know it?"

He did; and comprehension came to him, of a possible chance.

"Does Helga know it?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. His mind flung back to a time when he had discussed it with Helga.

"Do you suppose, David, that Margones knows it? If he does not—and Helga could see and read our flashes—"

They went in to Lupe. Naina asked him in Spanish, "Did you ever hear of the Alpha International Helio Code?"

"Sure I did, *señorita*," he responded eagerly.

"Does Margones understand it?"

"No," he said scornfully. "No one over there understand it but me; I can work it. What you—"

Naina demanded, "Does Margones know that you understand the code? Did you ever tell him so?"

"Sure, *señorita*."

"Think well, Lupe. If you're lying, I'll find it out. You know how I punish."

"I speak truth, *señorita*. Margones, he has seen me use a helio."

THEY left him. "You think he's lying, Naina?"

She did not. Lupe was the most skilled with transmission instruments of any of Margones's men, which was why the bandit leader had sent him to the radiophone, here in the hut.

They decided to chance it. Naina took the cylinder of the Johnson ray. It was the strongest light they had.

"From the doorway, David—don't dare use it in here."

They put on their outer robes, and stood in the doorway, with the room dark behind them. The wind plucked and tore at them. There was another patch of stars overhead; the brink of the cliff with its ladderlike steps was close to the doorway.

The valley stretched before them, a dim gray void with its conformations almost visible. Across it, up against the sullen clouds and the patch of stars, outlines of the opposite mountain crags vaguely showed.

David stood with the cylinder which Naina had shown him how to operate. He sent a flash—a blue-white stab of light into the murk.

Then another. Another. Long and short. Calling, in the Alpha code:

"*Helga. Helga.*"

Blue stabs of light. Even out here in the frigid polar night, the cold of the Johnson ray flung up a white mist. The wind tore it away. The blue light stabbed steadily into the darkness:

"*Helga. Helga.*"

Would she see it? Would she be able to answer? Or was Lupe lying? Would Margones answer? If so, then David would have betrayed himself. But if not, then Margones would think Lupe was calling, and he would get Helga to translate it for him.

David waited. Then he tried it again.

"It isn't visible over there, Naina."

She clung to him as a blast of the wind flung a swirl of drift-snow over them. They huddled, protecting their faces with the hoods.

"Try it again." She almost had to shout to make him hear her.

"*Helga.*"

They saw in the distant darkness a flash of blue seeming to answer them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SPRINGING THE TRAP.

THE bandits were dispersed about the small cave, with its single narrow entrance. With this shelter from the wind, it was warmer in here; the heat from the several small stoves was soon apparent.

Helga sat apart. No one seemed bothering with her. In the babble of Spanish she was neglected. But not wholly forgotten. She moved once toward the tunnel; Margones immediately came forward.

"Go back, Helga. Sit still. Soon we have the food ready."

He rejoined his fellows. Helga listened to their triumphant talk. The four men they had left at Naina's camp had evidently failed to steal her plane. Perhaps they had been discovered and killed. What of it? Four less with whom to divide this gold. The plane from Santiago Pequeño would be here soon. Lupe was experienced with the radiophone—he would have sent the message by now.

Time passed. They began to wonder why Lupe did not return. He had trouble making the radiophone work, perhaps? Well, Lupe was skillful with instruments.

Margones brought food to Helga, and sat with her while they ate it. The wind howled outside the cave. Inside, the fumes of alcoholite were heavy. The bandits were in gay mood. The talk rose higher. Helga heard a lewd remark from a near-by group. Suddenly half a dozen flushed evil faces were staring at her.

"—this Yankee girl — they say Yankee girls are—"

Margones whispered, "I will stay by you, little sweet one—"

He was grinning; but she saw his fingers go to his automatic. Margones was sober. He had kept away from the alcoholite this time; he had cautioned his men, but they would not heed him.

Helga said, "There's so little fresh air in this cave, Ramón—this perfume—"

Margones touched her. "*Niñita*—think when we are alone, to breathe it freely."

"Yes, Ramón. But—but now, I'm frightened."

He rose to his feet. "Come, *chica*—of them all, only you and I have sense. We will sit nearer the outside."

A guard was at the cave-mouth. He was annoyed at having to be there away from the fun.

"Well then, go inside," said Margones. "I will wait here. Soon Lupe will return."

A patch of stars showed overhead. The white snow-covered valley was faintly illumined. It was snowing fitfully; the wind howled, then suddenly was still. Then howled again.

"Lupe will—"

Margones stood staring. "What is that? You see it, Helga?"

A blue stab of light through the murk across the valley. Faint, faraway blue flashes, coming evidently from the little hut over there.

Crouching in the snow, huddled in their white garments, Helga and Margones gazed fascinated. Flashes of tiny blue lightnings. The Johnson ray. Lupe's ray, obviously.

To Margones the signal meant nothing intelligible. But Helga stared with pounding heart. Uneven, waning stabs of light, like a helio beam

She read to herself: "H—" The Alpha code! She read: "*Helga. Helga.*"

"That is Lupe," said Margones. "What, by the devil, can he want?"

Margones was puzzled; it seemed to Helga that there was chagrin in his tone. Chagrin because he could not read the signals, and was ashamed to admit it before this girl? She thought, of course, that it was Lupe signalling.

"*Helga. Helga.*"

WHY did he call "Helga?" Why not call "Margones?" Something within the girl told her to be cautious.

"That looks like the Alpha Code, Ramón. Does Lupe know it?"

"Yes. Is that what it is?"

"I think so. Can't you read it?"

The bandit had too much at stake; he overcame his pride. "No. Can you?"

"Wait," she said. "I think so." Something, some instinct, was warning her to go slow. She said, "Let me have your cylinder; I'll answer him—"

She stood with Margones steadying her. She flashed:

"*Lupe.*"

And then her heart leaped and began wildly thumping. From across the storm-tossed night came the helioed words:

"*This is David—are you Helga?*"

"*Yes.*"

She turned to Margones. She caught her breath, but she said steadily:

"It is Lupe, calling to you, Ramón."

"What does he say? By the Virgin, if he has not sent that message—ask him."

She sent: "*I am Helga. Tell me what to do.*"

A long answer. She said: "Lupe had trouble with the phone. But he got them. He told them in Santiago Pequeño to land the plane at the hut."

Margones cursed. "*Por Dios!* Why?"

Helga was quick-witted. Resourceful. She was outwardly calm, for all her thumping heart. She said:

"He has a plan, Ramón. It is a good one; wait, listen."

She was constructing her words partly by what David helioed from the hut, and partly by conditions as she knew them to be here at the cave. She was aware now that Lupe had been captured by David and Naina, and that David wanted her to trick Margones into bringing her across the valley.

"Ramón, listen: he says for you and me to come over. It is not far. He says, why should we divide our royalty on the gold with all your men? He has a plan to avoid that."

"What plan?" Margones was interested; greed was in his voice. "*Sangre de Dios,* a bold fellow, this Lupe! But why not? Listen to those *borrachones* in there!"

From the cave came shouts and drunken laughter. Helga departed from David's instructions with details of her own.

"Ramón, I don't want to stay here. I'm afraid of them." She put all the allurement she could muster into her pleading voice. "Ramón, why should we divide our gold? With Lupe, because we must, but that's enough. We've got to take into shares some of the men coming in the plane. And, Ramón—over there in the hut it will be warm. You and I alone—and Lupe is very discreet."

He clutched at her. "Helga, *niñita mía*—"

"THEY'RE coming, Naina! See them!"

From the window shutters they could see the quavering light down in the valley. A moving hand-flash light beam, dimly yellow, lost in the swirling snow. It bobbed into view again, like a tiny boat on a storm-tossed sea, but it came steadily forward; and presently David and Naina saw the two white figures struggling on foot through the drifts.

"Get Lupe out! Threaten him."

"Yes," she agreed.

The snow-covered figures of Helga and Margones came mounting the ladder-stairs up the cliff; Helga was in front with the bandit holding her.

"Ready, Naina?"

David cuffed the released Lupe. "There—that's a sample! Understand me?"

"Oh, *sí, señor.*"

"And I'll shoot—you'd drop like a rat before you knew what's happened to you."

They pushed him to the door; they crouched out of sight behind him, with automatics leveled.

Naina murmured in Spanish, "You call out, Lupe—then you step backward."

"Yes, I understand. I obey."

They heard Margones's voice:

"*Hola!* Lupe! Lupe!"

David opened the door, keeping behind it. Lupe stood there in the light, with an effort to hide his fright, and called his greeting: "Ramón! Come in. *Entre Vd.*" Lupe stepped back.

Helga came first over the threshold. She saw David and Naina, with Lupe quivering to one side.

"Hello, Lupe!" She turned back. "Warm in here, Ramón. Come."

Margones entered.

David leaped on him and bore him down.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON THE MOUNTAIN CREST.

THEY roped Margones and Lupe and laid them side by side in the storeroom. Naina stood over Margones.

"You dared to disobey me?" The old imperious ring was in her voice.

David drew her away. "No, Naina."

"But you have not hurt him—not punished him."

He smiled gently. "He will be punished. In Little America he will stand trial for murder." He put an arm over her shoulders. "You don't have to worry your little head about it—you're not judge and jury and executioner any more, Naina."

Helga stood gazing at them; at Naina's flush—and her obedience to David.

"Naina, you're beautiful," she said. They faced each other in the main room. "Beautiful, and so different."

"Am I? You're beautiful, too, Helga."

Without the outer white robe, Helga stood trim and competent-looking in her military cape of blue and red.

"Am I? You like this?"

David exploded, "Good Heavens, at a time like this!"

David had already hinted to Helga the reason for Naina's change. The girls clung to each other.

"Joe could get here in an hour," said David. "Look here—we've got to plan something."

David was afraid that any moment now the Chilean plane might come. It seemed incredible that it could buck this wind, roaring as it must be in the higher altitude. But still it might get through. If so, it was due here now.

"We've got to plan something, do something. With Margones's men over there, holding the claim, the Chileans can plant their flag and it will all be perfectly legal. I think I'll try calling Little America again to see when Joe left, and what the weather is."

Helga said, "Do that. Come over here, Naina, I want to talk to you."

They sat apart, while David hurriedly connected the instrument.

"Love him, Naina?"

"Oh, Helga!"

"Well, Joe could make me feel like that, only he doesn't know it. But this is no time to talk of love. I've an idea."

She told Naina how the bandits were roistering in the cave. "I had it figured out for Margones. Before we left them awhile ago, Margones told

his men to go ahead and get drunk. Well, with him out of the way, they would anyhow. They're all drunk over there now." She added irrelevantly, "They put some queer equipment in these international huts sometimes. Have you looked around the storeroom, Naina?"

"No. Why?"

"I was thinking, if I could find a package of pins, and a pair of shears—"

Naina stared at her.

"And I'm sure there'll be tacks or nails, and a hammer. Come on, let's look."

David got Little America. The plane had started shortly after his previous call. The weather was about the same.

"What are you doing?" he demanded of the girls.

They had found what they were after. They were both trembling with excitement. They told him the plan. He listened, amazed; but it was feasible. The bandits, a score in number, would be roistering in the cave. Only one entrance, Helga was sure of that. They would all be stupefied by the alcoholite—there would doubtless be no guard.

DAVID and the girls had automatics, and three of the Johnson cylinders—Naina's, the one belonging to Lupe, and one they had just taken from Margones.

"It can be done!" David exclaimed. "We'll try it."

Within fifteen minutes they were ready. They verified that Margones and Lupe could not escape.

"Better gag them," said Helga. "No use having them shout."

They shrouded themselves in their outer garments. They took the handflash Margones had brought.

Helga carried a package and a coil of rope. David took the rope.

Helga said, "I'll put this other under my cloak. You think it's large enough, David?"

"Of course. What matter?"

Naina said, "Give it to me, please; I want to carry it."

With a last look around they started. They extinguished all the lights of the hut, and closed its door. David had again called Little America. The operator there was still in communication with the oncoming American plane. David sent word that the plane was not to land by the hut, but across the valley at the gold claim.

They went down the ladder steps—endlessly, it seemed, down into the torrent of whirling drift snow. They struggled out across the valley. The floor was a smother of tossing drifts. Whirlies sucked around them, dancing, ghostly unreal. Or again, a blast of shriveled, frozen flakes enveloped them like a sand-storm—a stinging blast that could not be faced; under it they wilted and crouched until it had eased off.

Helga was more familiar with the conformation of the valley than were the others. She led the way, with David and Naina behind her. There was no snow falling from the clouds now. Those were still angry black masses up there, but they were thin and split by the wind. Like flying scud they lay strewn across the star field.

In David's judgment, the worst of the storm was over. The wind presently would die. It must have been fearful in the open air above the mountains. Down here in the inclosed valley it was freakish, but without its power now.

The valley was brightening a trifle. The starlight was breaking through, and the line of mountains ahead was dimly visible; the peaked razorback

mound which was Johnson's claim strike—Helga pointed it out; a sharply ascending slope up to a ledge; the cave mouth there where the roistering bandits were encamped; a ramp of frozen surface to its left, sloping to jagged pinnacle of the upper crest.

It was all dim and vague. From the cave-mouth itself the bandits could hardly have seen the figures floundering through the drifts on the valley floor, even had any of Margones's men been interested enough or sober enough to look. But David took no chances. They used no hand light; and they bore steadily off to the left.

An hour, it seemed to David—but it could not have been nearly that long. He feared every moment, with this slackening wind, that the Chilean plane might appear. But the stars off there showed nothing. Perhaps, heading into the violence of that wind, the Chileans had been forced down. That would account for the delay. Then the official expedition would come on by land. The valley off there opened up a slope to the higher distant plateau. The Chilean sleds would come racing down it, glaring with headlights and with flags flying.

DAVID'S thoughts were sharply brought back to realities. Helga twitched at the fur of his sleeve. She gestured toward the bottom of the ramp.

"I think we should go this way."

They began the climb. Another ten minutes and they reached the level of the ledge—a few hundred feet from the cave mouth.

Silent, frozen d a r k n e s s. They thought they heard a distant, muffled laugh.

"On up," said David, softly. It was dark here against this mountain; but the valley now was brighter than ever before. The wind had almost died; stars showed in several broad patches overhead. The white scene was beginning to glow serene under the starlight. Had the American plane fallen? It too could arrive any time now—if it had not fallen.

There was no sign of anything out there save purple-white, frozen, desolate emptiness.

They climbed for the crest. They stood upon it at last, fifty feet above the cave level, and a hundred and fifty above the valley floor. A wan shimmer was up here—white drifts, with the starlight on them. Pinnacles of rock upstanding like spires.

David uncoiled the rope. "We're in time!"

"Yes." The girls stood with him. Naina added, "There isn't any chance that if Margones's men came out on the ledge they could see us?"

"No," said Helga.

The ledge was hidden beneath the overhanging brow of this upper region.

"Besides," said Helga contemptuously, "they're all too drunk on alcoholite to do anything."

The cave-mouth was close enough so that in the silence now, with the wind no more than a gentle breeze, the sounds of the merrymaking bandits floated up.

David coiled the rope. He flung an end of it, which on his second trial went over a rock spire above them. He picked up the fallen end and pulled the rope taut.

"Now!" said Naina.

Helga exclaimed, "Look there!"

Across the wan starry valley, on the plateau in the direction of Santiago Pequeño, lights showed. A line of lights, coming up over an undulation of the snowfield. Lights, blazing on a

line of speeding dog sleds. The mining claim officials from the Chilean colony!

The line came over the crest and began the coasting descent; sleds, black blobs against the snow pack, white in the glare of the lights they bore—and resplendent with their national banners waving in the wind.

CHAPTER XX.

"I AM AN AMERICAN."

ONE scene more. I picture it as I personally saw it. Our expedition in the large commercial triplane from Little America was ready within half an hour after I got David's radiophone from the hut in the distant mountains. We took four sleds and their necessary dogs in the event that our plane went down and the journey had to be continued over the snow. It seemed a likely possibility.

We did our best to hasten the departure. I gathered the willing official witnesses. They would gladly have made the flight gratis, but the legal award of a small share in the royalties from the strike was an extra inducement.

The news of what we were doing spread rapidly throughout the town. Little America was excited. A crowd of furred figures stood in the storm at the flying field to see us off. We rose with flags flying; a spotlight from the field clung to us as we winged away.

I need not detail the flight. There were forty of us on board. We maintained for some time our communication with the Little America operator. We got the relay of David's second message—not to land at the hut, but to fly across the little valley. It told us the topography of the region. We made a sketch map of it.

I recall that it occurred to me to wonder that this gold could lie so close to Hut Eleven and not have been discovered when the hut was built. Yet there have been several such precedents in Antarctica. The valley, and all that cliffside, might easily have been buried deep in snow that season when the international officials were there.

At all events, after all these years the Johnson Lode was waiting, virgin territory unclaimed—waiting for the raising of the first flag. And it would not be a Chilean flag if we on this plane could prevent it.

We flew almost directly with the wind. Then we lost connection with Little America. We had tried several times to pick up Hut Eleven, but could not.

It seemed an interminable flight. I became obsessed with the idea that the Chileans would be there first. They had the storm against them, but they had less than half as far to go—and they had doubtless started first.

All this was overshadowed by my fear for Helga. All that I had heard was that she was in the hands of Margones's bandits.

The wind gradually lost its force; the stars came out in patches. Flying low, we skimmed over the Antarctic frozen uplands. Grimly forbidding wastes lay down there in the starlight. It seemed, as I gloomily stared down at the desolation sliding under me, incredible that anything could exist here worth man's struggle. Incredible that through the centuries this frozen continent was here, unassailed by man—and now to be the arena of nations competing for its riches.

We came at last over the rim of the valley, unmistakably our goal. In the observation cabin, where I was seated, a chorus of exclamations burst from

the men around me. But I sat tense, staring downward.

LIKE a stage setting, viewed with futuristic modernity from the air above, the climax of the drama in the valley was revealed. White-smothered valley floor, pale in the starlight. At one side the tiny blob which was the dark travelers' hut. On the other side, Johnson's razorback mountain ridge; a ledge and a cave mouth. A group of Margones's bandits had evidently just come to the cave mouth from inside. They stood, befuddled with alcoholite, staring at the valley.

The Chilean expedition was just arriving! The last of its sleds was hauling up into a group at the bottom of the upward slope. A glare of the expedition lights. Officials tumbling from the sleds.

The man beside me shoved binoculars into my hand. "Look up on top, Welch!"

On the crest of the mountain over the cave three figures were standing. Suddenly the spotlight from our descending plane fell upon them, revealing them brightly.

I raised the binoculars. David, with Naina and Helga, stood there among the frozen crags. A rope had been caught upon an upper spire. David held the lower end of the rope.

And up there on the rope a little flag was flying! Waving triumphantly in the wind; vivid, resplendent in the white searchlight glare. Claiming this golden mountain, so that the Chilean officials on the slope could only stand and gaze and salute it with their greetings.

I could see it plainly with the glass. Brilliantly illumined by our clinging searchlight, a crudely fashioned little flag. Stripes of red and white fabric; a field of blue, with stars!

I PUSHED my way through the crowd of jabbering Chilean officials. A confusion of mingled Chileans and Americans. A glare of white lights. Banners flying; bugles blaring their mingled national salutes.

But the mountain—a mile in radius from this peak—was legally claimed for America!

I came upon Helga. Her outer robe was open. I saw beneath it her heavy red and blue cloak. Pieces of its cloth were cut from it.

"Joe!"

She flung herself into my arms. And then I saw Naina, standing with David, holding the rope from which their flag was flying.

She called to me.

Helga pushed me away. "We made the flag, Joe—cut it out of my cloak and Naina's white robe. And pinned it together. Go tell her how glad you are—our flag—her flag."

She pushed me. I stammered, "Hello, David. Naina, that flag—"

An international official had come with the Chilean expedition. He shoved his way toward us. His recorders, with their books, were at his elbow.

"Who raised this flag?" he demanded.

"I did," said Naina calmly.

"Who are you?"

"I am Naina, daughter of Judson Roberts of New York City. I was born in unclaimed, neutral Antarctica."

Her glowing eyes turned to David, and then came back to her questioner. Her voice rang clear:

"I am Naina Roberts. I claim this territory for the United States of America. I am an American!"

THE END.

A Day Sooner

Deep in snow-swept New England lay the farmhouse where Earl Seavey planned to commit his perfect crime—a crime that couldn't go wrong

By HAROLD de POLO

EARL SEAVEY, as he stepped into his shabby coupé of a cheap and popular make, didn't look like a man who contemplated murder. Or murder and arson, to be precise. His entire aspect, his every movement, was too faltering. He started the old car as if he were half afraid to do it.

His features had been stamped with some of this fear, lately. If not exactly fear, with this hesitancy, this indecision. It was the more marked, in Earl Seavey's case, because his face was naturally a weak one. The lower jaw, particularly, seemed to be continually drooping.

As he shifted to second, to high, he snapped his jaw shut. Like a great many people, the steady purr of an engine with his hands on the steering wheel gave Earl Seavey a certain sense of security. Of power, almost. He was, at least, complete master of something.

His confidence increased as he reached the outskirts of Portland, left them behind him, branched off onto the smooth black road that led to the White Mountains.

What a fool he was to be afraid. Hadn't he planned everything perfectly? Timing, alibi, everything? Sure he had. Why, he'd planned them as carefully as—well, as he'd planned the theft of the nineteen hundred and forty dollars he'd taken during the last two months from the big wholesale grocery concern of which he was cashier.

He needed this confidence in order to help him attain physical comfort. His coupé did not possess a heater and it was December, and it is far from balmy driving in an unheated car in Maine during that season of the year. He found himself huddling down into his overcoat, and thinking of the ninety-odd mile drive—with that vitally important stop—that lay ahead of him.

Damn the grocery concern, anyway. What could they expect, when they made a slave of a man and paid him so little? Could they blame a fellow for taking a chance on the stock market, when all the big boys were cleaning up? Could they blame a man for going into the safe and changing the books, trying to get back his own small savings?

Damn his aunt, too. She deserved to get killed, he guessed, if any one did. Why couldn't she have helped him out, that time three years ago, when he'd had that chance to go into business for himself? A mere four thousand dollars, that was all he'd needed for capital. No. She'd decided to buy an annuity, the old miser. She had bought the annuity. Put every dollar she owned into it, too.

The old Seavey home, she had told him, would be his at her death. The furniture, too. He must not forget that, she had added. It was real an-

tique, had been in the family for generations, and what with the prices these touring city people were paying—Anyway, the house and furniture, together, were insured for twelve thousand and five hundred dollars, she had informed him.

Well, he'd get that twelve thousand, five hundred, all right, before he was many days older. Get it in time to cover himself at the grocery company before they took their semi-annual inventory. He'd be able to borrow on it, when they knew it was coming to him, if there was any delay while having the will probated. He guessed old Zeke Martin, Aunt Harriet's lawyer, would advance him a couple of thousand. At six per cent, of course.

Six per cent. He laughed. He wouldn't be thinking of any six per cent, when he got his hands on that money. He'd know how to hit that stock market this time. He was wise enough to realize his past mistakes, to know how to avoid them in the future. The next time—

Earl Seavey, as he let the car rush over the little traveled road under the bright moonlight, lost all his fears. He was mentally building up a fortune in stocks. He was picturing himself down in Wall Street, one of the great money kings who pulled the strings and watched the puppets perform.

HE was so engrossed in his dream that he didn't realize he was approaching Stoneham until he was almost there—until, in fact, he had actually passed the narrow byroad where he meant to park his car.

He noticed another thing, as he went into reverse and backed up. It was snowing. Lightly, in soft flakes. Not enough to hamper him, but enough to blanket all tracks of his skis even if they had left traces on the hard, crusted snow.

Everything was in his favor—everything.

He was lucky to have had George Binney invite him up to the Berlin winter sports carnival, where he was to participate in the ski jump. He was lucky to have run into George, a boyhood friend who had moved over into New Hampshire. He was lucky to have kept up his skiing, whenever he had found the chance. There weren't so many fellows who could beat him at that game, he guessed.

He had his car in that familiar road, now, and parked it in that grove of pines.

In a moment more he had his skis out, had them strapped to the shoes he always wore for this purpose. Then he was off through the fairly dense woods, although they were not quite thick enough to keep the moonlight from filtering through.

Not that Earl Seavey needed the moonlight. This was familiar ground. He had played over it, hunted over it, trapped over it, all during those boyhood years when he had lived with Aunt Harriet after he had been left an orphan.

It was, he had reckoned, nearly two miles to the old homestead. Knowing every path as he did, being able to take advantage of every slope of ground, he could get there and back in—well, in mighty close to an hour.

Had he made the foolhardy attempt to get there by car, he would have had to go on through Stoneham. As it was, he could branch off at the forks and continue on his way for Berlin. That, he told himself, was where his alibi was perfect.

Oh, everything was perfect.

It was two o'clock in the morning.

No one, certainly, would be awake and about. Anyway, his aunt's home was over a mile from the little backwoods village, while her nearest neighbor was out of sight down the hill, a good quarter of a mile away.

There, again, he was lucky. The Babcocks, these neighbors, were situated just right for him. Aunt Harriet, for the last seven or eight months, had been unable to do all her own work. Alice Babcock prepared midday dinner for her, while Seth, her shiftless farmer husband, did the rougher chores. Aunt Harriet, although she could have afforded it, had fought against any hired help that she would have had to lodge.

HE was more than lucky, Earl Seavey told himself as he glided expertly and swiftly over the crusted snow. He was pretty clever, at that—pretty foxy, all right. He had written Aunt Harriet that he was going up to visit George Binney; that he was going to enter the ski jump. He would, he told her in his letter, drop off on his way back and see her. Spend a night with her. He wanted to ask her advice about an investment he was contemplating—a bond.

He would kill two birds with that stone, he knew. She liked to give advice, and the mention of an investment would make Zeke Martin, her lawyer and executor, think that he had a few dollars. Zeke would hear about it, too—had already heard, in fact. She always called up Zeke and read him her letters over the telephone.

Clever? Foxy?

Earl Seavey, as he assured himself of his perspicacity, did more than banish all his fear. He became positively courageous. Why, there wasn't a single weak link in his whole chain. Not one. He would get the business over within three or four minutes, and by the time he was back at his car all the evidence would be up in smoke. Up in smoke was right, too. He chuckled again as he allowed that particular phrase to run through his head.

Earl Seavey went up the last little knoll before he realized it, and the old white house where he had lived so many years stood before him, clearly defined in the moonlight.

One of the windows, through the shade, showed a faint lemon color. It was Aunt Harriet's bedroom, facing south. Her night lamp, as usual, was on duty.

Deftly he stooped down and untied his skis. He went directly to the wood shed, where he knew there was a window that had never had a lock placed upon it. After the fashion of Northern New England architecture, this building as well as the barns was connected by passageway with the main house.

In a moment more he was in the kitchen itself. He had barely paused in the woodshed. It had not been necessary. Unerringly his hand had found the ax that was always in the chopping block.

This ax, not more than thirty seconds later, had been driven clean through his aunt's skull. She had, without question, at least enjoyed the mercy of dying without pain, without knowing.

He acted very quickly then.

Wiping the ax on the bedspread, he skipped downstairs and replaced it in the chopping block in the woodshed. In the kitchen he procured the five-gallon can of kerosene. It was more than half full. Upstairs once more, he emptied all of it onto the bed where the murdered woman lay. Then he touched a match to it.

Her night lamp, the verdict would be, had overturned.

Barely over a minute later, as he had reckoned, he was out in the open again, getting into his skis. As he straightened up from lacing them on, he could already see the flames reddening that lemon window—could see them, suddenly, shoot out a crimson tongue and eat up that pale yellow window shade. And before any neighbors would see it, he felt certain, the entire house would be a raging furnace.

He was correct in this belief. As he got into his car and made for Berlin, he could see the red glow of the fire on the horizon behind him.

EARL SEAVEY, driving back from the Berlin ski meet, about dusk on the afternoon of that grim morning, was feeling extremely happy, extremely confident in himself. His nerve, he was telling himself, had certainly improved. That was probably because all his worries were over with, he added. And they were, all right.

Zeke Martin, as he had expected, had telephoned him the sad news at George Binney's in Berlin, and he had appeared properly surprised, properly shocked. Old Zeke, furthermore, had been decidedly agreeable—as the money-loving lawyer always was agreeable to what he termed a man of substance.

He stopped in front of Zeke's office on Stoneham's lone street. He looked appropriately sad as he accepted the calloused hand of Aunt Harriet's executor.

"Too bad you couldn't 'a' come a day sooner, Earl," Zeke was saying. "Saved Miss Harriet, you would. Saved—"

"Yes," Earl broke in with a heavy sigh, "that's the way it always is with life. Always a day too late, or a day too soon."

"Saved a heap o' money, too," Zeke Martin went on, droningly, with a lugubrious shake of his head. "Insurance run out yesterday. I wanted Miss Harriet to renew it. Called her twice about it. She said to wait till you got here. Seein' you'd writ' her you wanted to make a investment showed you'd saved some money. Seein' you'd done that, she said, she figgered she'd maybe misjudged you. Anyways, she wanted to lower her insurance. Wanted to sell off three-four thousand dollars o' them antiques an' set you up in that business you spoke of, back—"

But Earl Seavey wasn't a killer. His nerve cracked. His brain cracked. His whole body cracked.

With jail staring him in the face at Portland, with all his great plans gone wrong, he began babbling out his confession like the pitiful weakling that he was.

THE END.

Angleworm Farm

ONE way of making a living is to raise worms for fishermen too lazy to dig their own bait. An angleworm farm at Alhambra, California, keeps six men busily engaged in raising worms and preparing them for sale. The worms are fed corn meal, and when sufficiently large and juicy they are sent to market packed in wet moss. *Vincent B. Wilson.*

The Men Who Make The Argosy

FRED MacISAAC

AUTHOR OF

"The Mental Marvel," "The Spectral Passenger," "Run, Dan, Run!" etc.

FRED MacISAAC is so well known that ARGOSY readers will be surprised to learn that his first story was published as recently as November, 1924. It was a two-part serial entitled "Nothing but Money."

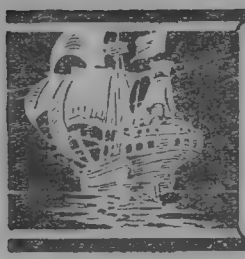
Previous to that time he had been a musical and dramatic critic upon New York and Boston newspapers, occupying an editorial chair after long years as a reporter and much knocking about the world. He brought to story writing a vast fund of personal experience and an enormous acquaintance among people of every walk in life. He was chummy with sea captains and grand opera singers, longshoremen and college professors, policemen and actors. He was a newspaper man in the days when the editorial room, not the counting room, was paramount. He made excursions into the field of press agenting. Once he traveled all over South America booking a tour for the Russian Ballet and transacted business in the Spanish tongue, which he learned during the sea trip between New York and Lima, Peru, and practiced upon the best people in Latin America.

As a concert manager and producer of open air spectacles he was famous in New England. He once put on "Aida" in the open air, with two thousand people and a group of Metropolitan Opera stars in the cast, a ballet of a hundred, a stage band of fifty and an orchestra of one hundred and twenty-five. He discovered a number of singers who have since climbed to the highest pinnacle of their art. While he was under the spell of music he followed opera all over the world, and heard it in Bayreuth, Milan, Paris, Vienna and Buenos Ayres.

The film business is no mystery to him. He spent a year behind the scenes in the biggest studio in Hollywood, and says he prefers to write for magazines. He likes California and spends about half the year out where the palm trees rustle in the hot air provided by the Los Angeles boosters.

Many of his characters are lifted bodily out of life, which is the reason they seem so real to ARGOSY readers. Many of the incidents described in his stories are personal experiences. With all this background, he still considers himself a young man, and thinks the world is a very fine place.

Since fiction writing has emancipated him from the daily grind he roams all over the globe. Manuscripts drift in from Cairo, Central America or Hawaii, and every now and then he walks into the ARGOSY office and is annoyed to find the editor has an engagement for lunch.



Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint

RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE

THE Frank A. Munsey Company announces the forthcoming reissuance of RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE. This publication, which in former years enjoyed extensive popularity among railroad men and women of all classes, will appear for the first time after a lapse of nearly eleven years on the newsstands on November 30. RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE had its beginning in October, 1906, and was published as a monthly magazine and later as a weekly until January 18, 1919, when it was merged with ARGOSY. In bringing out this magazine at this time the Munsey Company calls attention to the fact that the need of RAILROAD MAN'S has been determined by an extensive survey and an expressed desire on the part of railroad people in general.

The new RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE will be printed on a high grade of paper, will be profusely illustrated with photographs and drawings and contain articles of general interest on the unusual in railroad practice, operation and application. The fiction is being carefully selected from seasoned writers of railroad material, and every effort is being made to assure the utmost accuracy in technicalities whether they appear in fiction or in fact.

The new RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE has an Editorial Department which is manned by persons of railroad experience and editorial training. The policy of the editors is to serve the vast railway population faithfully and constructively with a variety of material and features such as can be found in no other publication now existing.

In addition to general feature articles there will be stories dealing with outstanding railroad personalities, not only among the highest officials, but among the lowly in the ranks. In the forthcoming issue an intimate glimpse is given of the rise of John J. Pelley, now President of the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad.

In the line of fiction are a fine railroad serial by Don Waters, "Blood and Steam"; a gripping short story of railroading in the southwest by E. S. Dellinger, and other stories by recognized railroad writers.

HERE come a few cheers for Fred MacIsaac's "Paris Madness":

McCloud, Calif.

Have just finished "Paris Madness," by Fred MacIsaac, and I certainly enjoyed it. Please give us more. Have been a reader of your magazine for about eighteen years and wouldn't have it changed for anything. Some of you knockers read "Paris Madness" and you'll feel better.

MRS. E. F. PETTUS.

The Weirs, N. H.

I just finished reading "Monkey Eyes," and it sure was a good story. I think "Paris Madness" was the best story of the year, as a short story. Fred MacIsaac is the best author on your staff of writers, anyway. I can't wait to see how "Bluffer's Luck" is coming out. I spend a great deal of my time reading, and I like ARGOSY the best, and then *Detective Fiction*. I put the pictures that you have sent me up on my wall, and I am looking forward to the one that you are sending

me. It is just about a year now that I have been reading ARGOSY. I guess I will read it the rest of my life and in the next world, if they have it. Keep ARGOSY as it is, and have a few more detective stories. I remain, yours as ever.

HAROLD W. LAW.

MR. GRAHAM is hopelessly in the minority in his opposition to "impossible" stories, but he is entitled to his say:

Pueblo, Colorado.

Have been reading ARGOSY for about five years and I hardly think I could get along without it. Let's have more stories like "Throw That Gat Out" and "It Got Him," by W. Wirt. And also some like "Two Thorpes." Here's a small knock: Why publish those impossible stories. They do not offer much thrill when one knows they are utterly impossible. Here's to a long life to ARGOSY, and more Western and sea stories.

K. GRAHAM.

HERE is his answer already:

Wenatchee, Wash.

I prefer the impossible and historic fiction stories. I do not care for Westerns, although I realize that others may like them. But please do not have too many like "Bluffer's Luck." I liked "Blood On the Snow," because it seemed different from so many Westerns.

"The Planet of Peril" is very interesting, and I can only repeat the trite saying that, "I can hardly wait for the next issue." I also enjoyed "The Shadow Girl" very much.

"The Big Shot" seemed to have an element of mystery in it that made it different and more interesting than most crook stories.

"The Phantom in the Rainbow" started my ARGOSY career. I haven't regretted it yet and I don't expect to.

If all of your detective stories are like "The Haunted Yacht Club," let's have more of them.

In closing I wish to say just have one, at the least, fantastic or impossible story in each issue of the ARGOSY, and I and many others will be perfectly satisfied.

IONA PIERCE.

SATISFIED as we are, says this reader:

Piqua, Ohio.

I am twenty-one years old and have been reading the ARGOSY magazine for about thirteen years.

My oldest brother bought the two magazines, ARGOSY and *All-Story*, and we used to read them together. I would tell him which were the best stories in the one I was reading, and *vice versa*.

The stories I like best are those written by W. Wirt. I've just finished "The Big Shot," by Frank L. Packard, and I think it was very good.

I think you have just the right number of serials and short stories to make it a very interesting magazine. Keep it up.

JOHN MOLLMAN.

ANOTHER enthusiast stands up to cheer for "The Planet of Peril":

Corpus Christi, Texas.

I have just finished reading, for the second time, Otis Adelbert Kline's story, "The Planet of Peril," which recently appeared in your magazine. I liked it so well that I ordered it in book form, and expect to read it again.

During the past twenty-five years I have read the ARGOSY, *Cavalier*, *All-Story* and *Railroad Man's Magazine*, all of which have finally been merged into one, but I have never enjoyed any story more than the one by Mr. Kline. He seems to have the gift of making impossible people and happenings real, and therefore interesting. That is what people who work all day want for reading and relaxation, something that will make them forget the day's trouble and hustle.

Mr. Kline's story came to an end all too soon. Here's hoping you have another and longer one in the near future.

RICHARD H. HART.

QUITE a few favorites has this reader:

Minneapolis, Minn.

I have been a constant reader of the ARGOSY for the past ten years, and find it very much to my liking.

The main reasons I like the ARGOSY so well are: Chas. Alden Seltzer, Edgar Franklin, Fred MacIsaac, Lieut. John Hopper, Geo. F. Worts, Loring Brent, E. J. Rath and J. Allan Dunn.

Thomas Thursday writes very good short stories, and I think Ray Cummings is a splendid author.

My favorite stories have been "The Purple Limited," "Square Deal Sanderson," "The Man Who Mastered Time," "Jolly Flies the Roger," "Bing, Bang, Boom," "Every Minute Counts," "The Untamed," "The Crime Circus" and "The Return of Zorro."

THOMAS BARTLETT.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

I did not like.....

because.....

Name.....

Street.....

City..... *State*.....

11-23

A DEFENDER of *Mme. Storey* takes up the gauntlet:

Megargel, Texas.

I never was inclined to write to magazines and make comments about the authors. If I did not like the magazine, I quit buying it and got some other. But I want to say that my family and myself have read ARGOSY for a great many years. We have kept ARGOSIES for years, and when we are short of reading matter, go to the closet and dig out enough old ARGOSIES to get a complete story.

The ARGOSY suits me just as it is, and in fact, the cause of this letter is reading a letter of Richard McKirdy in your issue of September 28 which stated, "I have only one dislike and that's *Mme. Storey*, who gives me a pain." Well, only one dislike isn't so bad, but what a pity the good fellow failed to appreciate the *Mme. Storey* stories, which I believe have caused much pleasure to thousands and thousands of ARGOSY readers.

I like to read stories by Fred MacIsaac, Geo. F. Worts, Garret Smith, Kenneth Perkins, W. C. Tuttle, Lieut. John Hopper, John Wilstach and, last but not least, Hulbert Footner. These are a few among the best, but space forbids a complete list.

The best of luck to good old ARGOSY.

T. T. MEADE.

Looking Ahead!

Crime and Science in League!

What possibilities for evil when Science, armed with new and amazing weapons, joins forces with the underworld!

Beginning next week we start a most unusual and fascinating series of thrilling crime novelettes. First will be

THE DARKNESS ON FIFTH AVENUE

by MURRAY LEINSTER

In the same issue don't miss

THE BIG KICK

A two-part story of wartime adventure off the coast of Ireland

by Ralph R. Perry

A MAN OF SIZE

A football short story that carries the snap and sparkle of the gridiron

by Thomas Barclay Thomson

COMING TO YOU IN THE ARGOSY OF NOVEMBER 30th

YOU CAN NOW Pay Your Bills

AND HAVE MONEY TO SPARE

with a steady Income for the rest of your life—

if you will take care of my business in your locality. No experience needed. Pleasant, easy work, can be handled in spare or full time.

No Investment Needed

I furnish all capital—I set you up in business, advertise you, and do everything to make you my successful and respected partner in your locality. I will make you my partner in my fast growing, established business—but I don't ask you to invest a single penny in merchandise. Everything is furnished to you FREE—just look after the business in your locality and we will split all the money 50-50! Partner may be either man or woman. All I ask is that you have ambition and can devote a few hours each day to distributing my famous products to friends and a list of established customers. High grade food products, teas, coffee, spices, extracts, things people must have to live.

Your Groceries at Wholesale

As my partner I furnish your groceries at wholesale—I do everything to see that my partners get all the advantages of Big Business. Big FREE supply contains over 32 full size packages of highest quality products. Choose all your groceries, at wholesale, from my big list of over 300 home necessities. Quality backed by $25,000.00 Bond.

I Show You An Easy Way to Make $15 a Day Steady Income

LOOK!

$36.47 in an Hour and a Half

Mrs. S. M. Jones, mother of four, made $36.47 first 1½ hours. Working only 2 half days a week made $2000 profit in few months.

$200 in Spare Time

C. C. Miner, Iowa, made $200 in spare time his first 15 days. His first 4 days brought him $74 profit.

"$15 a Day Easy"

Says W. Skiles, Pa., "I have made $15.23 in only 2 hours." In addition to a big steady income he says, "You have given me $1,437 worth of gifts, checks and prizes."

Burned Mortgage on Home

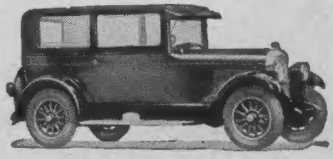
Rev. McMurphy, Alabama, tells how Van brought him from poverty to a mortgage-free home, new car and financial independence.

You, too, can be free from money worries for life—send the coupon.

I don't want you to take any chances. I give you a GUARANTEE that is the talk of the entire industry. This is the most amazing guarantee ever made for a steady, year 'round income. I can make this **guarantee** because I know you can do as well as my other partners whose letters are shown on this page.

Besides going 50-50 with my partners on profits, I WILL FURNISH YOUR HOME with hundreds of wonderful premiums, including pianos, living room sets, etc., that I give as premiums. Send coupon at once for my signed GUARANTEE which protects you against loss and assures you $100.00 a week for full time or $3.00 per hour for spare time work.

I Furnish You Chrysler Coach



I offer every one of my partners a new Chrysler Coach as soon as they come with me. I want my partners to be prosperous and look prosperous to gain respect from everyone in their localities. That's why I will offer you ABSOLUTELY FREE this brand new Chrysler Coach to use in your business. This is no contest! It is yours to keep just as soon as you show me you are in earnest. Send coupon today.

SEND COUPON AT ONCE for APPLICATION

FREE FOOD PRODUCTS COUPON

C. W. Van De Mark,
Health-O Quality Products Company,
Dept. 913-MM,
Health-O Bldg.,
Cincinnati, Ohio

Without obligation on my part, send, at once, application for territory and details of partnership offer. free food products.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

Health-O Quality Products Co.

C. W. VAN DE MARK, Pres. and Gen. Mgr.

Dept. 913-MM Health-O Bldg.

CINCINNATI, OHIO

Copyright 1929 by C. W. V. D. M.

CASH IN NOW WITH THESE 2 BIG WINNERS!

LIFT-A-LITE ASH RECEIVER

and DE LUXE New Size Money WALLET SET

SENSATIONAL FREE OFFER
TO GET YOU STARTED IMMEDIATELY

We will send you these two sensational sellers—everything complete as illustrated here—for the price of only one—$3.45. With these samples in your hands we will prove to you that it is easy to earn as high as $2500.00 within the next 30 days or take back the items and refund you $4.00 in cash.

LIFT-A-LITE ASH RECEIVER—IT'S NEW
A Unique Combination of LIGHTER and ASH TRAY

Lift-a-Lite Ash Receiver is built for the modern smoker's convenience. By simply lifting the cap a fine flame instantly appears. Replace cap and you are ready to enjoy your smoke with tray at hand to receive ashes or rest cigar, cigarette or pipe. Made of durable BAKELITE in a variety of lustrous colors and beautiful mottled designs. The tray is especially deep and spacious—5 inches wide by 6 inches long—richly designed and beautifully decorated; ornamental and useful on every fine table and desk. The lighter burns ordinary lighter fluid. New flints are inserted in a second. Will last a lifetime. Ideal for living room, library or bridge table and every home, office and club. Sells for only $3.45. You make up to 200% profit. And here is our other winner selling big.

DE LUXE New Size Money WALLET SET

A New Combination Set of Wallet and Pocket Lighter.

This combination of new size money wallet and lighter to match is proving a whirlwind seller. Every man will want this De Luxe Set. The wallet is smartly designed of genuine leather with handsomely embossed rose pattern. It is made to meet every requirement of the present day for a handy, convenient wallet to carry both the new size money and old large bills in separate compartments. The lighter is of the sure fire type and covered with genuine leather embossed to match the wallet—a regular $5.00 value which you can now retail for only $3.45, and make up to 200% profit. Reap a harvest of the biggest profits you ever made in your life by getting behind these 2 big sellers now. Our proven successful selling plans will show you how.

ONE FREE

Samples of these 2 Sensational Sellers for the Price of only ONE—$3.45

ONE FREE

You can start taking orders immediately after receiving samples. Everybody a prospect—dealers, business houses, club rooms, givers of gifts, etc., offer you tremendous sales and profits.

MAKE $2500.00 IN 30 DAYS

Our Six Tested Proven Selling Plans Show You How

RETAILS FOR
$3.45

We have originated an entirely new advertising imprint plan which brings you big commissions automatically in addition to the profits you make on the sale of this item. Lift-a-Lite Ash Receiver is designed to take advertising imprint. Most business firms regularly give away advertising gifts and premiums to their customers and friends. Over one hundred million dollars is spent annually in premium and specialty advertising. Get your share of the [illegible] in this tremendous business. With our amazing new Advertising [illegible]t Plan you can cash in $2500.00 a month **WITHOUT ACTUAL-LY [illegible] THE SELLING.** Your neighborhood dealer does that for [illegible]plete details of this amazing plan will be sent you with your [illegible]. Our other plans are—C. O. D. Plan—you take orders and collect your profit in advance. Initial and Emblem Plan which brings instant sales and sells every prospect. Salesboard Plan—an extra profit maker. We show you how to build a steady growing repeat business with dealers. Each and every one of these plans will lead you to big earnings. Full details of all sales plans including sales helps, order blanks, etc., will be sent you with your samples.

READ THIS EXTRAORDINARY GUARANTEE

You take no risk. Send for these samples now, and when they arrive, if you are not satisfied it is the biggest opportunity ever offered for big sales and quick profits, return the samples and we will refund you not $3.45 but $4.00 in cash—55c extra for your trouble. YOU ABSOLUTELY TAKE NO RISK.

FILL OUT COUPON BELOW, enclose $3.45 or $1.00 deposit and we will ship C. O. D. for balance. You will receive one Lift-a-Lite Ash Receiver and one new size money De Luxe Wallet and Lighter Set—everything complete as illustrated here—with full details of all our amazing selling plans. There isn't another opportunity that compares with this. Exclusive territory to producers. Act now!

CLIP AND MAIL COUPON TODAY

GORDON MFG. CO. (Dept. CJ-65), 110 East 23rd Street
New York, N. Y.

Your two big winners and selling plans interest me. I accept your special offer. Send me one **Lift-A-Lite Ash Receiver** and one **De Luxe New Size Money Wallet Set.**

Enclosed find ( ) Full Remittance $3.45.
( ) $1.00 deposit. (Will pay balance on delivery.)

It is understood you will refund $4.00 if I return these samples. Please include full details of all your selling plans.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

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